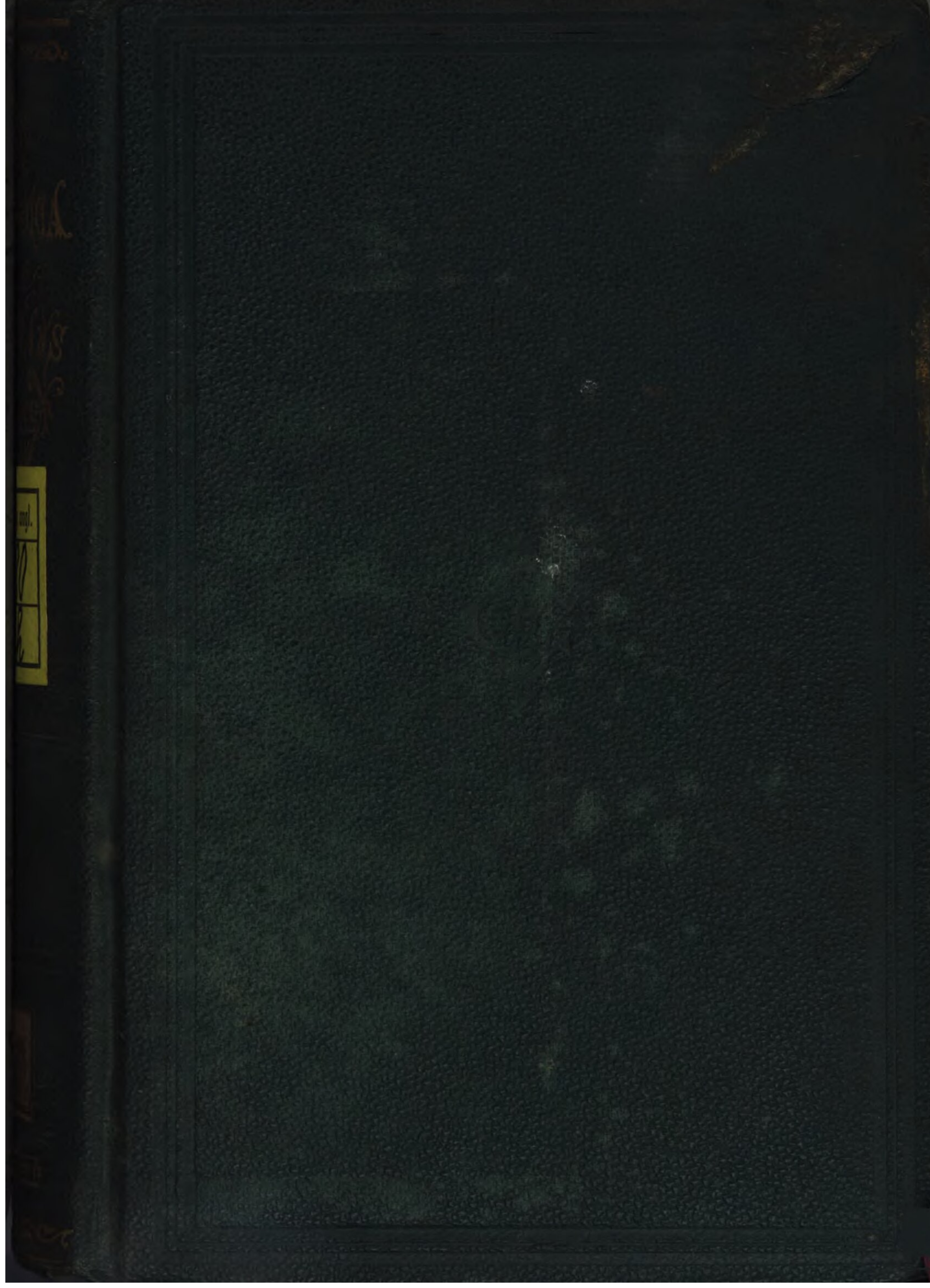




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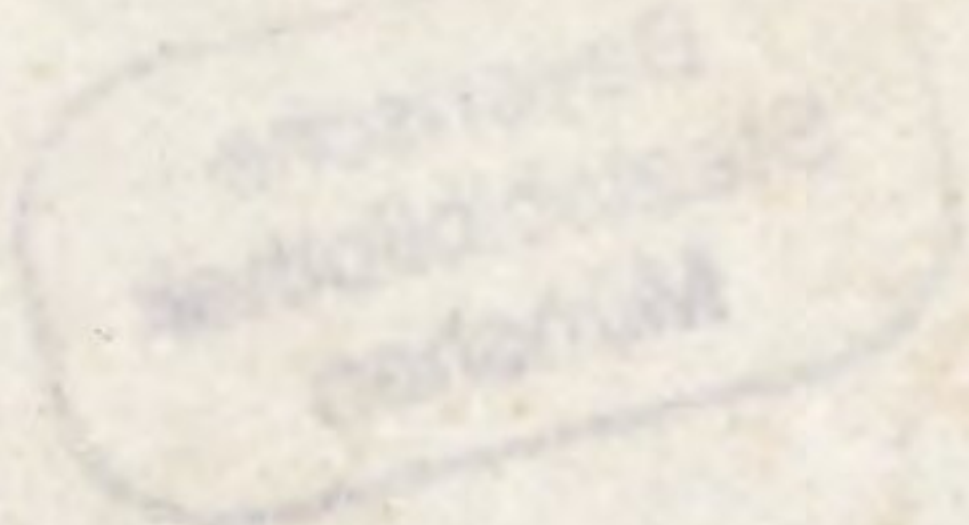
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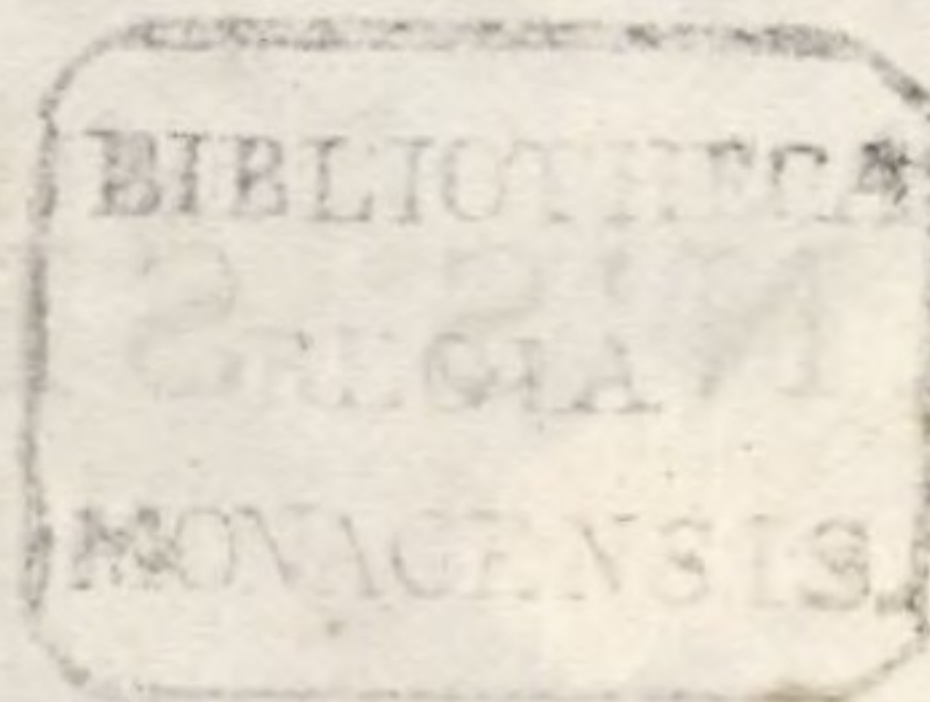
MRS. CAROLINE FAIRFIELD CORBIN.

"I have written truth,
And I, a woman. * * * For the truth itself
That's neither man's nor woman's, but just God's.

E. B. BROWNING.

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TO

JOHN STUART MILL,

The Author would hereby express her Admiration and Gratitude,

FOR HIS NOBLE EFFORTS

In behalf of the Enfranchisement of

W O M A N .

**"Force rules the world still;
Has ruled it; shall rule it.
Meekness is weakness;
Strength is triumphant;
Over the whole earth
Still it is Thor's day."**

LONGFELLOW.

**Ere long a fairer morn shall rise,
With purer air, and brighter skies,
When Force shall lay his scepter down,
And Strength shall abdicate his crown,
And Love incarnate sway the race,
With wisest power and tenderest grace.**

PREFACE.

It is not strictly as a work of art that this book appeals to public favor and criticism. It has not been written for immortality, but to serve, if it may, a single purpose to the present day and generation.

It has seemed to the writer that the ideas of the relative positions of the sexes, the status and work of woman, and the nature and office of love, require a new setting forth at the hands of this generation. The old method of expressing these things, and the old faith concerning them, were wise and good in the olden time; but now, as in the days of Christ, new bottles must be fashioned for the new wine of advancing civilization.

In attempting to contribute her mite to this yawning treasury, the writer has not been in the mood, indeed she is not sufficiently learned, to touch statistics, but has been content to leave them to the handling of those exact minds who are already working with so much effectiveness among them. Neither could she always, from the nature of the work, cite authorities nor answer objections. Many themes have been simply touched, which would require volumes for their elaboration; and many weighty arguments have been omitted, because they did not come within the scope of the work, or would have clogged too much the flow of the narrative. What the writer has mainly aimed to do, has been to get at a few underlying principles as old as the hills and place them in, possibly, a new light before the reader.

Her grateful acknowledgments are due to Mrs. Alfred Clapp, of St. Louis, President of the Western Female Guardian Society, to whose earnest appeals and kind encouragement the inception and final accomplishment of this work are mainly owing; to Rev. Robert Collyer, of Unity Church, Chicago, for the generous and judicious loan of books, for some just criticism, which was also gentle, and

for a kind appreciation of the purity of her purpose; and to Dr. De Laskie Miller, Professor of Obstetrics in Rush Medical College, Chicago, for truest sympathy and most helpful help in the line of his professional knowledge and experience.

Concerning anything in the subject matter of this book which may seem unusual, the writer can only say, that throughout her whole work she has labored under an imposition of conscience, and

“When God commands to take the trumpet,
And blow a dolorous or a thrilling blast,
It rests not with man’s will what he shall say,
Or what he shall conceal.”

It is only right to add, that she has made the subject of Prostitution and its causes one of thorough practical research, and speaks no more strongly concerning it than her knowledge of facts will warrant.

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A WOMAN'S SECRET.

I.

A BACHELOR AND A BABY.

It was a gray March morning, chill and windy, with a dampness in the air which promised rain. Dr. Milton Gaines standing upon the steps of his lodging-house and prospecting the weather, felt that it would be unsafe to start upon his journey without his umbrella, and stepped back into the hall, to unstrap it from his valise, and unbutton it for instant use.

Being a deliberate man, this occupied him for some minutes, and when at last he again took up his valise and drew out his silver watch to look at the time, he saw that he had only a few minutes left in which to reach the train.

"It is—time—I was—going," said the doctor, "time I was going. The cars start at nine o'clock. It won't do to be left. I—shall—have—to hurry."

This was a weighty resolution for the doctor to arrive at, but when he was once in motion, you saw that, notwithstanding his fifty years and his two hundred and odd pounds avoirdupois, he was equal to the emergency. He was broad shouldered and strong of limb, and without seeming to walk very fast, he yet got over the ground in a way which would have severely tried the wind of many a more boastful pedestrian.

His eyes meanwhile were minutely scanning the scene before him. The doctor did not often visit the city, and

when he did, he meant to lose nothing which came in his way.

"A city is not the place I should choose to live in," the doctor was wont to say, "but there is a great deal to be learned in a city, a—great deal—to be—learned. When I undertake the expense of a journey to the city, I always try to get my money's worth in *information*, if nothing more."

A few blocks down the street, you would have noticed a curious expression coming into his eyes; deep grey eyes, set under a ponderous mass of brow, and overhung by bushy eyebrows. His gaze was fixed upon some object just in advance of him. When within a dozen paces of it, his resolution to hurry seemed to encounter an obstacle, for gradually, as if an invisible engineer had whistled "down brakes," the doctor retarded the motion of his two hundred and odd pounds avoirdupois, and just as he reached the said object, very deliberately brought himself to a stand.

"What's—this? What's—this?" asked the doctor.

A ragged but honest-looking street child, a girl of fourteen, perhaps, stood holding a delicate, well-dressed babe in her arms, and crying bitterly.

"A woman, sir, gave me this child to hold an hour ago, and she hasn't come back yet: she said I was to hold it until she came back; but if I don't go home soon mother'll beat me. Oh! dear, Oh! dear."

"Mother'll beat you, will she. Well!" this to himself, "what—are—you—going to do—with—the child?"

"I don't know, sir."

The babe meanwhile had fixed her bright eyes upon the doctor's face, and was regarding him with the steady unwinking gaze peculiar to infants. The doctor had been only curious at first, he was a very inquisitive man, but

gradually he seemed to look at the matter in a different light. He shifted his umbrella to the hand which carried his valise, and settled himself into a comfortable position for scientific observation.

"Good—clear—eye," he soliloquized, "soft skin, no humors. He touched the child. She didn't seem afraid of him, but put out her hands as if willing to go to him. Of this he took no notice, but examined her clothing. "H—m! H—m! Looks healthy, clothes well made; about four—months—old."

The doctor was not a man to be seized by hasty impulses. Quite the contrary; but he was by nature kind, though if you had faced him with the accusation, he would have looked vacantly off into space, and whistled meditatively, instead of replying to you. Besides, he had an ulterior motive. When the doctor had a grave project in view, ten waiting railroad trains, all in the last agony of screaming impatience, would not have moved him a hair's breadth. Therefore, he still stood looking at the babe and—thinking.

Just then a policeman happened along, on his way to the City Hall; a prompt man of swift, sure motions. He took in the whole thing at a glance.

"A case of desertion, sir. Happens about twice a week on the average. Come with me," to the child.

"Stop—stop," said the doctor with great gravity. "Wait a minute; where—are—you—going—to take—that child?"

"Send her up to the Island—Ward's Island. What we do with all of 'em."

"What becomes of them?"

"City provides for 'em. Sometimes people adopt 'em."

The policeman scented a benevolent stranger in the doctor.

"H—m! h—m!" said the doctor deep in reverie. "H—m!" and then he whistled gravely. "Adopt 'em!" looking at the child. "Black hair and eyes; sharp features."

"Yes," said the policeman, laughing, and inclined to hurry up the doctor's deliberations, "don't look at all like you. No cause for scandal. Better take it."

The doctor did not look in the least appreciative. He never did when the joke was at his expense.

"Any bonds to be given? Any papers to be made out? How do you know but the woman will come back?"

"Oh! no fear of that," said the policeman, knowingly. "They never do come back. As for the papers, there is a form that is sometimes gone through with, but it don't amount to anything more than costs to the lawyers. Just give me a dollar to drink your health and keep off the rheumatism, you know, and you may take this one along and no more words about it."

The doctor looked green, but he wasn't.

"I've lost the train," he said, "I shall have to wait all day. I'll go through with the forms. I'm a country doctor, sir, a country doctor; and country doctors ride far for small fees, but I can stand the costs, sir, for all that. I—can—stand—the—costs?"

The little cavalcade had taken up its line of march, by this time, to the City Hall. The girl demurred, but the doctor quietly told her he guessed she'd better go along; and that settled it. It required but a few minutes to register the doctor's name and address. He then started off with his baby—his by right of adoption—towards the boarding house which he had just left, the ragged girl still acting the part of nurse. As they came out of the City Hall gates, the grave, respectable old man, followed by the girl and baby, and unaccompanied by the police

officer, a slight, youthful woman, in a plain gray dress, stood watching them from a shady corner of the park. There was an eager, wistful look upon her pale face, and for a moment it seemed as if she would follow them. But suddenly her eye rested upon the lettered valise. It read "Milton Gaines, M. D., Wyndham." Apparently she gave up her purpose then, and disappeared.

The doctor was a little nervous about being seen upon the street with a baby. It was a great relief to him, therefore, when he reached his boarding house, and consigned the infant to the care of Mrs. Crane, its mistress. Then, mindful of the beating, the apprehension of which had been the means of attracting his attention to the deserted child, he produced his well-worn leather pocket-book, drew therefrom a goodly roll of bills, and selecting with much care a one dollar note, gave it to the girl.

"There," he said, "give that to your mother. It's a little torn, but it will pass—it's good—and tell her not to beat you."

The doctor's cadences and inflections were all peculiar to himself. His measured, even tones, as if the waves of emotion, which toss other souls, and lift and sway the current of expression, were strangers to his seas, were very impressive; and this child, to whom he had scarcely before addressed a word of any personal import, looked upon him with admiration, and a certain kind of awe. I believe that, as she walked home, thinking of her adventure, she rather envied the poor, abandoned babe, who had found so grand a friend.

Mrs. Crane was a woman whom the doctor had known for years, and in whom he could confide, and the two were very busy all that day. First, he had the forms, as he called them, to go through with. It was very easy, nothing more so, to prove himself a proper person to be entrusted with a child. His banker and his lawyer were both pro-

duced, with due ceremony, to affirm that he was a highly respectable bachelor of unexceptional character and good estate, a worthy citizen, and an ornament to his profession. The city officials were most profoundly gracious in his presence, and behind his back nodded to each other,

"Solid! Got the rocks! But a queer old customer, isn't he?"

This, that to some men would have been a most annoying task, gave the doctor a profound satisfaction. The officers of a great city were, *ex-officio*, men of importance. He had appeared before them with credit, had impressed them with a sense of his solid worth and consideration in the community in which he lived; had, in fact, shown them that he was a share-holder in metropolitan wealth, for his banker had not failed to mention that he owned both real estate and bank stock in the great city. The whole town, concentered in its elected officers, had acknowledged and bowed to him. It did him good.

Mrs. Crane was, meanwhile, revolving projects for the conveyance of her charge to its new home. To her it seemed a matter of difficulty, but the doctor settled all that with a few words.

"There's a ten dollar bill, Mrs. Crane; you will get the child whatever it needs for the journey. Then, if you can provide me a good girl, to take care of it on the way, I'll pay her expenses, and as much more as she thinks right. Understand me, I don't want a permanent nurse girl, only some one for the journey."

"But, doctor, what are you going to do with it?"

"Don't know, don't know," said the doctor. "Can't tell, must wait and see. Can tell better by and by. What I want now is a girl for the journey."

Fortunately Mrs. Crane could supply this desideratum, and the evening's boat carried the little party out of the great city, to the quiet shades of rural Wyndham.

II.

THE LION AND THE MOUSE.

Moses Moss was the cobbler of Wyndham. His little brown cottage, standing apart from the town, in the corner of a bit of pasture, with only an ancient chestnut on one side, and an elm in the front of it, and a tiny thread of a brook winding through its alders just below, to give it a picturesque look, had not at all the air of being of importance in any story. But on this particular morning, of which we write, the situation within its four rude walls was highly dramatic.

Moses himself was at his wits' ends. In fact, though he was what is called a good natured man, it was a short road to the end of his wits. The truth was, his wife, decidedly the better half of him, was sick in her bed, for the eleventh time, of that same illness. There was no warm, soft morsel of pink humanity wrapped up in flannels this time. Poor broken-down nature had failed in the last crowning essential of life-giving. They had borne out the little, still, cold body, the semblance of a living baby, and consigned it to the care of mother nature, who has uses for all such things, and never scorns the humblest gift.

In the little bed-room, which opened off the living room, kitchen, dining-room, nursery, all in one,—parlor there was none—lay Rachel Moss, groaning with pain, the consequence of nature's efforts to restore her poor worn-out, shattered frame, drained of all its best forces by this constant creating and equipping of new lives, to something like working order. The noise from the kitchen distracted her; the cry of her year-old baby, who fretted with his

coming teeth, tore her heart with nervous sympathy and yearning; and the impatient fretting and scolding of her husband, who was trying to keep the children in order, and get them dressed, and at the same time prepare their scanty breakfast, added the last note to the screeching discord which assailed her.

"I say, Rachel," he said, appearing at the door, "can't you call some of the children in there. They're all right 'round under foot, and a-yellin' and a-screamin' so't I can't hear myself think. I do wish you would hurry and get well, or I shall go crazy."

With that the mother raised her feeble voice: "Sallie, bring the baby here, and put him in my bed. Now bring the comb, and comb your hair. Poor baby, mamma's sorry for him. Let mamma rub his little gums."

Moses had still as much as he could deal with outside. He was a short, round-favored man, with a red face which hinted of whiskey, a muddy blue eye, but, on the whole, an expression of that kind of good nature which comes from a lymphatic temperament, and a want of those keen, nervous forces, which, if they make a man irritable, also make him capable. Just now, however, whatever there was in him of resistance was roused to its utmost. The brood around him was very numerous and very insubordinate. There was first, Theodore, a boy of fourteen. After him, Jane, and then some six or eight,—it is immaterial,—crude youngsters, some inheriting the paternal obesity, some the maternal angularity, and rejoicing, it seemed to an uninitiated observer, quite indiscriminately in the names of Sallie, Tommy, Teddy, Belindy, and the like. Then there was Theodore's dog, Badger, an ill-looking cur of some mongrel breed, and chiefly remarkable for its ugliness, both physical and moral; and at last a great gray cat, wonderfully sleek and well-conditioned, considering that it stood at the tail of so long a line of

mouths. The truth was, that Diana, or Di-á-ny, as the family orthoepy went, was a mighty huntress, and so had resources of her own. In fact, she owed her name to this accomplishment, and the inkling of mythological lore which Mrs. Moss had contrived to pick up in her somewhat heterogeneous reading. These all, it seemed this morning to Moses, were separate sources of anarchy and misrule.

"Children," broke out the distracted paterfamilias at length, "if you don't stop this racket, this infernal hulla-bello, I'll horsewhip every one of you."

"Specially Theodore," added the five-year-old Belinda, gravely; and the specialty was well taken, for that hopeful youth had harnessed the cat and dog together with hemp twine, to the infinite harrassment of those two sworn foes, who were manifesting the same by sundry edifying yelps and growls.

"Theodore, get out of this house and take that dog with you," roared Moses. "Now, Jane, take up the potatoes, and we'll try to get some breakfast."

"Pa," said Belinda, "Theodore's going to set Badg on to that woman. Don't let him. May be she's coming to bring us something good."

Moses rose from the seat at table where he had just bestowed himself, with a groan. Ordinarily he would have paid little attention to any freak of Theodore, but this morning he felt that if any woman was approaching his door it was for his best interest to conciliate her. A woman, somehow, just then seemed to Moses a most desirable thing. He rushed out of doors hatless, expecting to see some woman of the village bringing, perhaps, a bowl of gruel to Mrs. Moss. He was too much excited to discriminate, and seizing a stick of wood, with which, used as a missile, to persuade Badg into a retreat, exclaimed to Theodore:

"Go into the house, you villain. I'll teach you to insult a woman."

"I wish you'd just make up your mind where you want me," said Theodore, with a provoking semblance of humility. "'Tain't three minutes since you sent me out doors. Guess I'll go in and get my breakfast while the fit is on ye."

Moses had discovered by this time that the female in question was a stranger to him. She was young, at least not thirty, it seemed to him, with a pale and rather pretty face, that yet had a look of sorrow in it, which even Moses' blunt perceptions could not fail to notice. She wore a plain gray dress, and her whole appearance was neat and lady-like. She stood just outside the gate, having wisely kept that defense between her and Badg's teeth.

"Mornin', ma'am," said Moses, with as bland an air as he could assume at a moment's notice — "was you a-coming in?"

"I wished to stop," she said uneasily, yet with a voice that must ordinarily be a very cheerful and pleasant one, "to inquire if you knew of any one who needed help. I want to get a situation as—as—a servant."

"Want to hire out, do you?" said Moses, easily putting her application into the vernacular of the district.

"Yes, sir, that's it."

Moses was about to answer in the negative, when a bold thought struck him. He had never in all his married life hired a day's work done in the house, but never before, it seemed to him, had things come to just such a desperate pass as on this morning. If this woman's services could be obtained, he felt justified in employing her; whether or not she was ever paid, was her own lookout.

"What wages do you ask?" inquired Moses, putting on as shrewd a look as he was capable of.

"I'm not very particular about wages at present," she said. "I want to find a home; and when I have shown what I can do, it will be time enough to decide about wages."

"That's sensible," said Moses. "'Tain't everybody that feels so, though. But you don't look as if you knew much about house work."

The woman waived the question. "Were you wishing to hire?" she asked.

"Well, yes," said Moses, rather sheepishly, "I was thinkin' of it. Ye see, my old woman's sick—that is, she's laid up, and what with the children and all, I ain't getting on very well. I don't know's I can promise very big pay, but if you're a mind to come in, and take hold, ye can have your vittles, least wise for a day or two. After that ye can look around and do better, may be."

The woman looked at the house. It was very humble, but after all had not the squalid look she might have expected from its owner's appearance. After a moment's reflection, she replied:

"I think I will stop, thank you; if your wife is sick, I may at least be able to do her some good."

Moses opened the gate with the look of a man who has driven a shrewd bargain, and is well pleased with himself therefor, and escorted his help into the house.

"You can sit down, Miss ——. I didn't ask your name."

"Rebecca March," she replied, after a moment's hesitation.

"Very well, Miss March, we were just having breakfast, as you see, and if you'll take off your things you may as well sit up to the table with us."

"Thank you," said Rebecca, "I've breakfasted already. Perhaps while you are eating I'd better go and sit with the sick lady."

"Very well," said Moses, looking pleased, "I'll show you in there."

As they entered the bed room, Moses addressed his wife:

"Mother, this is Miss March. She wants to hire out and ain't particular about wages, and I thought I'd have her stay here a day or two, till we get a little to rights again. My name's Moses Moss," to Miss Rebecca, "and this is Mrs. Moss."

The introduction thus successfully accomplished, Moses withdrew, leaving the two women together.

"I'm glad to see you, I'm sure," said Mrs. Moss, faintly. "I'm afraid you won't want to stay long, though."

The stranger, with quick, silent, womanly intuitions, was taking in the whole significance of the scene. The poor, meager furniture of the room, the pale, sick face, with its hollow eyes, and matted, yellow hair, the hard struggle for neatness and self-respect, against weakness and poverty, and that horde of active, healthy, untrained children. The hopeless sorrow and dejection of her face seemed softened by a shade. Here, at least, she could be useful, could win back confidence in herself and her ability to struggle with the hard problems of her life. The energy, and cheerfulness, and vivacity of her nature, which some great storm of sorrow would seem to have over-swept and paralyzed, began to tremble again into conscious life and action.

"You've been having a hard time," she said to Mrs. Moss, after the latter had given her a little account of her illness. "But you must give up all care now, and we'll keep you as still as possible, and in a few days I think you'll be better."

Then she went quietly to work to comb out the long, yellow hair, and put it up comfortably under the cap. She bade the sufferer be quite still, while she gently washed her face and hands with tepid water. She smoothed the

pillows and straightened the bed clothes, and asking a few words of direction, went out into the kitchen and made a bowl of very palatable gruel. Thus rested and refreshed, Mrs. Moss declared herself able to get a little sleep, if left alone. Therefore, breakfast being over by this time, Rebecca went out and closed the door, and began upon her day's work in the kitchen.

It seemed at first an almost hopeless task to bring order out of the confusion and anarchy which Moses' short reign had introduced. But that dignitary, glad to resign his scepter into hands apparently so worthy, took himself off to the village tavern, and left a clear field for his successor. He couldn't have done her a greater favor.

The first thing necessary was to organize her forces. Jane was set to washing dishes; Theodore was cajoled, by the promise of sweet cake for dinner, into sawing wood with which to cook it. The baby was fed and put to sleep, and the remainder of the urchins delighted with the task of finding out how many noses there were in the illustrations of an old copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs, which Rebecca had found upon the shelf. It was a new idea, and took amazingly.

With her forces so disposed, the new housemaid set about a rigorous process of sweeping, and dusting, and scouring, until, by ten o'clock, the little room was made so neat and cheerful that one would scarcely have recognized it for the same disorderly, dirty place she had entered in the morning. The coarse rag carpet was so cleanly and thoroughly swept, that it seemed to have been dipped in new dyes, so clear and bright its colors shone. The paper curtains at the windows were rolled up evenly, and let in the bright spring sunshine over the floor; the table and chairs were all in their places; the few books upon the clock-shelf were well dusted, and arranged in proper order. Robinson Crusoe, and Bunyan's Pilgrim, and

Thaddeus of Warsaw, Don Quixote, and The Scottish Chiefs, making a very goodly assemblage, with coats so little torn, and faded, and soiled, as to testify to the care which somebody had exercised over them during the boisterous infancy of all these children. Whatever else went to destruction in that house, books were always held sacred by Mrs. Moss.

Rebecca's face looked really cheerful, the children were good natured, and even old Diana, coming in from her morning hunt, and finding that Badg had been put out of doors, with the bribe of a great marrow-bone, which would keep him busy for an hour at least, lay down by the fire, and after licking herself into becoming neatness, curled herself up for a nap.

"Do hear Diany," said Sallie, who had attended singing school all winter. "When she's cross she always purrs in short meter; when she's pleased, in l-o-n-g meter; she's purring real old long meter doxology now."

Just then there was a cry from the commentators on the martyrs, who were clustered about a window.

"Here comes the doctor! Here comes the doctor!"

Rebecca, who was moulding a batch of bread at the kitchen table, stopped for a moment, and turned very pale. Then she went on with an effort at composure, just lifting her eyes to glance out at the shabby old chaise and sturdy white horse which had stopped at the gate, and from which Dr. Gaines alighted.

The doctor opened the door without ceremony, and walked in. He didn't speak at first, running his eye critically over the details of the room.

"H'm! H'm!" to himself. Then, with a civil bow to Rebecca, "Good morning, ma'am."

"Good morning," she replied, commencing to work her hands out of the dough, for the purpose of attending to him.

"Oh! don't hurry," said the doctor, "don't hurry. I'm

—going—to warm—my hands. Moses isn't at home, it seems."

"No, sir. He went out after breakfast."

"You're some relation of his, I take it?"

"No, sir."

"H'm! You go out nursing?"

She hesitated a little and colored. "Not exactly; I happened in here, and seeing how much help was needed, concluded to remain a day or two."

"H'm! What—is—your name?" squarely, as if it had been a judicial duty to ask it.

"Rebecca March, sir."

"You don't live around here, I reckon?"

"No, sir."

The investigation was getting painful to Rebecca. The doctor saw it, and calculated on the sooner getting at what he wanted to know.

"Have lived in the city, I judge?"

"I don't know why you judge so," she said, with the sweet severity impossible except to a woman, "unless because my *manners* are different from those of country people."

By this time she had her hands clear of the dough, and went into Mrs. Moss' room, leaving the doctor to meditate. If Miss March desired ever to be on good terms with the doctor, she had greatly periled her cause, for his self-love was very tender, and his memory very long. In one way only could she hope to make him forget the affront she had offered him. To solid, substantial worth he was never contumacious.

Rebecca found Mrs. Moss awake and smiling; evidently she had heard the conversation.

"I'm glad you said it," she exclaimed; "the doctor is so meddlesome. But, then, he's a good man, and a first rate doctor. Let him come right in."

The doctor didn't make a long call. The door into the kitchen was open, and he asked no more questions about Miss March. But he looked around the bedroom, remarked its neatness, and the tidy appearance of the bed, and as he reached the door going out, having first satisfied himself that Rebecca was not within hearing, he said: "I don't know who that woman is. It isn't any matter. You'd better keep her a few days. Better—keep—her—a—few—days."

But the doctor wasn't balked yet. On his way home he met Moses, and drew his old gray horse to a deliberate halt.

"That's—a—pretty—good—looking—woman you've got at your house, Moses. Who is she?"

"Yes," said Moses, who had evidently been comforting himself with a glass. "Yes, sir, pretty trim built. Wants to hire out. Do you know of anybody who wants help?"

"No, no," said the doctor, pensively. "I don't know of anybody that wants help. From the city?"

"I reckon so, by the looks. Come along by my house this morning, and wanted to know if I knew anybody wanting to hire. Things wasn't going just right—never do, you know, when the woman's laid up—so I took her. Guess she'll do."

"Yes," said the doctor, again with that pensive inflection. "She'll do. She'll—do. G'long."

III.

WOMAN'S WIT.

Dr. Gaines felt an interest in this stranger. First, because she was a woman, and the doctor, though a bachelor, had a weakness for women. Second, because she was so pretty a woman, and so evidently out of place in Moses Moss' cottage; and third, and not least, because the doctor had for years been the best informed man in the town, concerning all its domestic history, and he didn't like to leave such a neat little mystery as this unfathomed.

Intellectual philosophers assert that all objective knowledge is obtained in two ways, by observation and testimony. The latter resource having failed him, the doctor was thrown back upon observation. Therefore, when he called at the cottage next morning, he became more than usually social, and prolonged his call at least fifteen minutes beyond its usual limits.

But Rebecca had a little the start of him. She had been having a chat with Mrs. Moss concerning him, and was by this means well up in his peculiarities. It was strange how these two women seemed to take to each other. Mrs. Moss had had too much hard work to do all her life, and was, besides, for reasons which will develop themselves hereafter, too unsocial in her habits to be a gossip. Therefore, if she thought at all concerning the previous history of this stranger, she cherished no curiosity on the subject. She knew that Rebecca was refined and gentle in her manners, to a degree which had never been possible to her. She read in her face the traces of deep sorrow, to which her tried, sympathetic

heart responded fully ; and she felt, moreover, the deepest gratitude for the gentle, womanly help she had received from her. In her eyes, Rebecca was a lady, an angel, a ministering spirit, and by all these claims possessed herself of the poor woman's gratitude and admiration.

As for Rebecca, I think it was simply the feeling of community in sorrow which drew her toward Mrs. Moss. In her helplessness and humility, too, she felt that it was a great thing to gain shelter in a virtuous home, however poor it might be. She had a deadly fear of being observed and questioned, and in truth it had not been boldness but sheer desperation which had resolved her to rebuff the doctor as she had done. After he had gone, the reaction had saddened her. Mrs. Moss had even detected tears in her eyes, and a dejection in her manner which the good woman felt determined to cheer.

"You mustn't mind the doctor," she had said. "He's the oddest man living, but he's very kind. What do you think he did the other day, when he was down to New York?"

Rebecca looked up with deep interest in her manner.

"Why, he found a poor little baby on the street, that its cruel mother had left, and he just took it home with him to adopt."

"Hasn't he children of his own?" asked Rebecca, in a low tone.

"Bless you, no. He ain't married!"

"Who will take care of the baby, then?"

"Oh! there's women enough about the house. There's his mother, old Mrs. Gaines, she's just the finest woman in these parts. A real, nice woman she is. And then there's Joanna, that's an old maid sister of the doctor's. I wish you could see Miss Joanna, she's such a sweet lady. She's tall like the doctor, but not fleshy—quite thin and so pale. She lost her lover when she was a girl,

and so has never married. The doctor has often said that Joanna ought to marry, just to have a baby. He's so fond of children. And then he says every woman needs the care and company of children to make them really women. I reckon he was thinking of Joanna, as much as anybody, when he took that baby."

"And how was Joanna pleased?"

"Lucretia, that's their hired girl, she's been with 'em thirty years or more, said it was the queerest sight to see her. First, she seemed to be afraid to handle it, for fear 'twould break, and she was as bashful about it as a young girl; but after a little she got used to it, and now she takes all manner of care of it. Day nor night she won't never let it out of her sight. She's got a little crib for it, and it sleeps right in front of her bed, and there's no end to the pretty clothes she's making for it. Lucretia says it seems as if she's grown ten years younger already. And there's such a pretty color a-comin' into her face."

Rebecca's face was very pale. She couldn't speak, so she hushed the wailing, year old babe, in her arms, and began to walk with it up and down the room, holding it so tightly, oh! so tightly, to her breast.

Mrs. Moss went on: "The doctor is so fond of his mother and sister—he just thinks his two eyes of 'em. Never says much, but then he's so careful of 'em. For that matter, Dr. Gaines knows the most about women of any man I ever saw. It seems to me, sometimes, that most men are born fools, or else stark, staring mad, about women. They'll be sensible enough about everything else, but when they come to that one thing, they act just as if they hadn't eyes in their head nor understanding in their brains; and they mean well enough, too, a good many times. The Lord help 'em."

This last exclamation was spoken in such an earnest,

heartfelt way, that Rebecca, in spite of herself, was forced to smile.

"I don't know what it was," continued Mrs. Moss, "that made the doctor so different from other men, 'less 'twas having such a mother. I tell you, to make a first-rate man you've got to give him a first-rate mother. Then, being a doctor, and setting so much by Joanna, that's been a help to him, till it just seems as if there wasn't nothing about a woman that he didn't know. He can just tell when they need medicine, and when they need kind o' pityin', and when they need cheerin' up with a bright word or a pleasant smile. 'Pears to me, if more men knew as much, there wouldn't be so many miserable, broken-down women in the world. But, then, as I was saying, he's dreadful inquisitive. I do think he got the habit prying into all the causes of his patient's sickness; for what makes folks sick ain't often on the surface, to my way o' thinkin', and the doctor is awful inquisitive; but, then, he don't mean no harm, and he don't often say much. If I had a secret that I really wanted to keep, I should think a pretty good way to do it would be to tell it to the doctor, for then he'd stop prying; and, if you told him in confidence, two yoke of oxen couldn't draw it out of him."

If this had been said as a suggestion, it failed of its intended effect, for Rebecca only held the child closer to her bosom, and continued to walk up and down the room, her face retaining its fixed, steady look.

Yet, somehow, this long gossiping talk with Mrs. Moss had softened Rebecca's heart toward the doctor. The look of sickening, deathly anxiety faded from her eyes, and if her nights were sometimes spent in weeping, she had yet courage and cheerfulness, during the day, to brighten up that somber home with the soft, spiritual illumination which only the presence of a gentle, loving woman can supply, and make the place seem nearer heaven

to Moses Moss than any he could remember in the whole course of his life, unless, perhaps, the warmth and shelter of his mother's bosom, or his own home during those first months or years before the gold of his married life had tarnished. For even Moses, bound thrall that he was to his slavish, sensual appetites, could remember rare occasions on which he had turned his soul sunwards and caught glimpses, through his dimmed and bleared vision, of a spiritual light and beauty, of which his ordinary life was very bare. These scanty flashes of illumination occurred while the priestess at his altar retained the spiritual strength and freshness of her youth, before years of ignorant and profane handling had converted her from a household divinity to a household drudge.

This pure womanly presence brought with it, its inseparable blessings of light, and life, and love. Moses felt the stirring of faint regrets and ancient tendernesses toward his patient, suffering wife. The clean, well-ordered home, weaned him, for the time, from his tavern haunts; the children, awed or coaxed into submission by the cheerful Rebecca, became once more his delight; and poor Rachel, lying upon her bed, felt an unexpected strain of sweetness flowing into her life, and silently thanked God.

The days had grown to weeks; Rachel was sitting up, and began to talk of taking hold of household tasks again.

"Do you keep still," said Rebecca, quietly; "I require no wages of you, and the food I eat is no loss to the family, for you'd not be a bit more forehanded six months from now, if I were away. In fact, I rather think, by superior economy, I save you more than that amount. There may not come such a season of rest to you again for years. Therefore keep quiet. I'll be answerable for Mr. Moss' good behavior; and do you give yourself time to get back a little of your wasted youth."

The doctor, who still dropped in once or twice a week,

confirmed this advice, talking over the matter in a quiet way, which brought out the fact that, though Rebecca had not lost sight of her original intention of going out to service, she was not in immediate or pressing need of doing so. The doctor had not forgotten to pursue his laudable researches, and while he sat gossiping in Mrs. Moss' kitchen, he bent a very penetrating eye upon Miss March. Looking upon her in that shrewd and practiced way of his, he saw, or fancied he did, something which set the wheels of conjecture buzzing in his brain—an intangible something that suggested dumbly, like a premonition, that, in the sacred temple of Love, all gates of mystery had been swung wide to her. Nay, as she bent over the cradle of the infant Moss, it became evident to his acute vision, that at some time she must so have bent over a cradle whose occupant was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. Out of her eyes had gone mother-beams; her lips had curved to mother-smiles; her hands had the true and unmistakable mother-touch.

“Ho! Ho!” mused the doctor. “Ho—ho—ho—strange! A strange thing! Don't understand it. It—ain't—all—right!”

With this view of things impressed upon his mind, it was no wonder that he entered the Moss kitchen one morning, a week later, with a grave brow.

Mrs. Moss was busy washing the breakfast dishes. Rebecca was nowhere to be seen. Waiting a few moments for her to appear of herself, he finally asked:

“Where is Rebecca?”

“Up stairs, I guess. Shall I call her?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, with profound gravity. “You like her, don't you? You think she's a good woman?”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Moss, with emphasis. “She's an angel. You just ask Mr. Moss; he'll tell you. And she's the best nurse I ever saw.”

"Good to the children," the doctor suggested, rather than asked.

"Why, they love her better'n they do me, I really believe. And you know children ain't fools about who's good to 'em."

"No, no," said the doctor, still very grave; "children are good judges of human nature; good judges."

By this time Rebecca made her appearance, looking rather sad and troubled. In truth, the question of what was to be her next step in life, had weighed heavily upon her mind, for the past few days. She had learned to be amused by the doctor's quaint ways, however, and she had confidence in the kindness of his heart, when he was not too inquisitive, and the sight of him unconsciously reassured her. Even his unusual gravity did not so much alarm her as it might have, had she known all it imported; and she shook hands with him, and sat down to her sewing, a dress for Belindy, in a quite unconscious way.

"H'm!" commenced the doctor, drawing his chair a hitch nearer to her. "I want to ask you a few questions. You said you were looking for employment?"

"Yes, sir,"—quite steadily.

"What are you willing to do?"

"Anything, sir, that is honorable and remunerative."

"I see you are not so particular as some that have less right to be. Unless—H'm! Are you a married woman?"

A quick flush passed over Rebecca's face.

"No, sir," she replied, in a tone so low and so unsteady that the doctor's heart trembled a little, for sympathy. But he had a higher motive than curiosity now, and was not to be baffled by a bit of womanly weakness. He paused a moment.

"A widow, perhaps?"

Rebecca looked up at him with a dumb, helpless look in her eyes. He knew what it meant. It was a moment of

moral weakness. Should she tell him the truth or no? Or would he relent and withdraw his question? The doctor was inexorable. He was pushing her sorely. He knew it, and she knew that he knew it. He thought that he held the advantage, and he meant to wield it.

What men call woman's wit, is not wit at all, but, in ninety-nine cases out of one hundred, merely the instinct of self-preservation. She holds the best and purest gifts entrusted to the race. By the very nature of her constitution, she has no physical strength wherewith to defend them; but she has something more potent, the direct gift of God, for her defense. The doe, you know, is safe from the hunter's dog while the fawn follows her.

"A widow, perhaps?" said the doctor.

"No, sir," said Rebecca, in a firm tone, and yet dropping her eyes.

The doctor was instantly convinced of three things: That this was no woman of easy virtue; that she knew something which he never would find out by asking questions; and that she held her word dearer to her than any mere temporary convenience. The doctor whistled quietly to himself.

"Well, well," he said, "it is none of my business. You can nurse sick folks; and—I don't—think—you'll steal—the spoons. I guess you'd better come home with me."

Rebecca grew suddenly pale.

"No, sir," she said, "I do not think I can do that."

"Why not?" asked the doctor, simply.

"Because—because," she replied, "I do not think it is—quite the proper place for me."

The effort was apparent, but a little pricking of conscience misled the doctor. His face grew a shade graver as he said,

"Eh! Oh! Somebody's been telling you that I'm a bachelor. Well, *I* don't want your services. If I *did*,

you would be very wrong in refusing them; but I *don't*. I have a married sister, Mrs. Darrell. She has two children—just coming down with scarlet fever. Will you go and help her take care of them?"

"Very willingly," replied Rebecca. "Shall I get ready at once?"

"As soon as you please. You needn't ride home with me, if it don't suit you. I'll send Joel down for you, in an hour. Joel's my man. You needn't be afraid of Joel." The doctor's eyes twinkled with suppressed humor, as he buttoned up his old gray overcoat, and prepared to leave. "You needn't—be—afraid—of—Joel," he repeated, as he shut the door after him.

"It is my opinion," said Mrs. Moss to her husband, that evening, after Rebecca's departure, "that the doctor is getting a notion after Miss March."

"Oh!" rejoined Moses, "the doctor always has an eye for a good-looking woman. It is a wonder to me that he never married; though, if he got a hankerin' after a woman, he wouldn't think o' doing anything about it before year after next."

"Don't you believe that about the doctor," said Mrs. Moss, positively. "He knows how to strike when the iron's hot, as well as the next man. If Miss March can make out a straight story about herself, and is agreeable, I shouldn't wonder if she was Mrs. Dr. Gaines before the year's out. When the doctor has once made up his mind, he's wonderful prompt."

"Well, he might be about getting married," said Moses. "At any rate, she'd make a good wife for him," and so the subject dropped.

IV.

ABOUT MONEY-LENDING.

Ralph Darrell sat in his counting-room. It was a little, dark, dingy place, at the back of his warehouse, with windows looking out upon the great mills owned by Darrell & Co. Industrious spiders had woven their webs across the panes, and what had been golden motes, infiltrating the summer sunshine, lay dead and lifeless now—mere dust, upon the ledges. Yet, the place to its occupant never was unseemly; and, indeed, it had a certain order of its own. The desks and chairs were all squarely placed. It was swept every morning by a man, who, of course, was never troubled by the reflection that the broom might possibly be usurping an office which properly belonged to the scrubbing brush. The great, unpolished stove gave out a cheery warmth, and the papers lying about were all placed in a manner that was full of significance to their owner's eyes.

Ralph Darrell liked the place; it was his home. At the other end of the town stood a handsome mansion, with his name upon the door plate. His servants rolled the walks, and shaved the lawn, and kept the shrubbery in order. His money had built, his taste had furnished the house in the main, though his wife had, no doubt, added a thousand little decorating touches. That same wife of his—once Laura Gaines—he held chiefest among his earthly possessions. He was prouder of her than of houses, or lands, or stocks, or even of those great mills yonder, which were the outgrowths of his indomitable will, ambition and perseverance—his children, so to speak, born of his heart and his brain, and nearer akin to

him than the four fine boys and girls in the house yonder, who called him father, and reproduced, whether he would or not, the buoyancy and lightheartedness of his own youth. He was proud of them, also; fond of them, in a certain way. He would have told you that he was spending all his days, and almost nights, in that dim place for their sakes; believed it, too, himself; but I think his good angel sighed over the hallucination, and credited most of his self-sacrifice merely to his love for those children of stone out yonder.

So this, after all, was Ralph Darrell's home. Here he was most truly himself, felt most at his ease, at best command of all the faculties upon which he most prided himself. If I sketch him for you sitting in his arm chair, with a Market Report in his hand, and a pen over his ear, the portrait will be characteristic. You will like him; everybody did like Ralph Darrell. He was handsome, to begin with; of medium height, with broad shoulders, a fair, open physiognomy, the nose a little too *retroussé* for perfect beauty; but imparting a piquant, wide-awake look, far more in consonance with his character of a first rate business man. His eyes were large and very dark—well set in his head; his hair thick, black and curling; and his complexion, clear and healthful. If he were a trifle dyspeptic in his habit, it was because of excessive brain labor, not from any constitutional taint or weakness. In manner, Mr. Darrell was prompt, alert, yet suave, always making friends, always obliging them, yet never losing money by them.

As he sat there, reading the Market Report, with a quiet gleam of satisfaction in his eye, a gentleman entered—quite a different sort of person.

Abraham Gladstone was a taller, larger, in every way a more powerfully built man. He was of the Saxon type, strong, but fair; with clear, gray eyes, and features

which, without being regularly handsome, were still impressive. His manner was simple but dignified, with possibly a trace of the air which a man carries when he is conscious of a discrepancy between his worth and his market value. If he had this air now, however, it was not habitual, but simply the effect of coming in contact with a man of Ralph Darrell's stamp, and that under circumstances which secretly stung his pride more than he would openly have allowed.

"Good morning, Gladstone," exclaimed Mr. Darrell, cordially. "I'm glad to see you; happy to congratulate you upon the fine plea you made yesterday. I didn't hear it—was too busy; but I heard of it, which was better. Everybody praises it. A good start you've made. It's all right with you now. You've only to hold fast in the faith, and you'll outstrip us all."

Gladstone's face lighted up with a quiet smile—a smile of deep content, which yet did not quite relieve his features of their uneasy shade.

"Yes," he said, "I was fortunate in winning that case. It has made me feel secure in my profession, which I scarcely did before."

"Oh! but you might have," said Darrell, kindly. "We all knew that you would not fail; but this case must have brought you substantial tokens of success."

"Yes, the fees were liberal, and what is better, I shall perhaps gain some practice from it. But the subject of fees brings me to my present business with you."

Mr. Darrell's face assumed the bland air of a man who expects a satisfactory communication; but Mr. Gladstone's manner grew more and more uneasy.

"The interest upon the mortgage which you hold is due to-day, I believe; yesterday, I had no doubt of my ability to meet it; to-day, however, I find myself compelled to test your leniency in the matter."

Mr. Darrell's manner certainly changed by a shade; but he didn't appear in the least troubled.

"It's only a small matter, I believe—a couple of hundred dollars, or thereabouts."

Mr. Gladstone mentioned the exact sum.

"I shall pay you one hundred dollars to-day; the other I hope to be able to raise during the week. Of course it is a very unpleasant necessity."

"Oh, nothing of the sort," said Darrell. "A thing of that kind between old friends is not worth mentioning. By the way, why don't you get the money of the doctor. I happen to know that he has it by him; though pray don't tell him I said that. Of course I'm always happy to oblige a friend, but this confounded business keeps me always short. It's quite different with the old doctor, you know. While I have the kindest inclination in the world, he has not only the inclination, but the power to oblige you."

"To tell the truth," said Mr. Gladstone, "I thought of that; but the doctor, if he is your brother-in-law, is such a close man, I hesitated to ask him."

Darrell laughed, a frank, rattling kind of laugh.

"Just such a blunder as people are perpetually falling into. Now, you, as a lawyer, should have been wiser. Take my advice, and go to the doctor at once."

"Where am I to find him at this hour, I wonder?" half soliloquized Gladstone.

"Oh! on the road, most likely. You'll know the old gray if you see it, I take it."

Abraham Gladstone was not a man to ask a favor, and be refused, without knowing it, even though he were turned off in this clever, joking way. But he knew the world, too, quite too well, to grow sour over the affront, unless, indeed, it might be in secret. So he started off,

down the street, toward the doctor's office, leaving Darrel to mutter:

"Now, that's some freak of his abominable wife. I'd rather have a millstone tied about my neck, than such a woman. It wouldn't sink a man half so surely."

But the next minute Ralph Darrell was more deeply than ever immersed in his market report, with little thought of Mr. Gladstone's, or any other man's domestic millstones.

The latter was very fortunate in finding the doctor just tying the old gray's halter to the hitching post, in front of his office. It was with some perturbation that he approached him. It was not an easy thing for Abraham Gladstone to ask a favor of any man; it was still less so, to approach in that way this man, whom, all his life, he had heard quoted as a model of thrift and close dealing, and, moreover, of inquisitiveness. There was a deep, deep soreness in Abraham's heart, which no hand, none whatever, might probe. The lightest finger-tip laid upon it, never so lightly, it seemed to him, at this moment must sting him to madness.

"Good morning," said the doctor, as he deliberately took out his saddle-bags and ascended the two or three steps which led to his office.

Abraham returned the salutation, followed him up the steps, and in at the door. Fortunately, the office was empty.

Inquiries followed, concerning Mrs. Gladstone's health. She was a patient of the doctor's.

"We are tolerably well, thank you," replied Gladstone, with as careless an air as he could affect. "Well, that is, in body. The help I want, just now, is help for the pocket. Could you lend me a hundred dollars this morning, doctor?"

"How? h'm!" said the doctor, twirling his thumbs, and looking down at the floor. Then raising his eyes sud-

denly: "Did not old Gleason pay you for that fine speech yesterday? He ought to have paid you well; paid you—well—cash down. It was a good speech; I—heard—it."

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Gladstone, "he paid me. Still, I need the hundred dollars all the same."

The doctor looked off into vacancy, and whistled.

"Gleason is an odd man," said the doctor. "When I was a student, riding around the country with old Dr. Skinner"—and thereupon he launched out into a story, intended to demonstrate that Gleason was an odd man; which point, it is safe to conclude—for the doctor's stories always hit the nail on the head—was abundantly proved.

At the close of it, Mr. Gladstone again gently reminded the old gentleman of his request.

"A hundred dollars!" said the doctor; "that's a good deal of money. I don't know why people should expect me to have a hundred dollars about me, at any particular time they happen to want it. I began life a poor boy; a—poor—boy. What my father left was barely enough for his widow and the girls; I never touched a penny of it, not—a—penny. My education cost me a pretty sum. I've never been anything but a country doctor. I've ridden far, always for small fees; often for none at all. My expenses have been heavy; one way or other, as heavy as any man's in the town; and yet people expect me always to have a hundred dollars about me, when I am asked for it."

"Oh! if it isn't convenient," said Mr. Gladstone, deprecatingly, annoyed, as men were apt to be, at the doctor's roundabout ways.

"I didn't—say—it—wasn't—convenient," said the doctor, coolly; "I didn't say anything about its not being convenient. It was just so when the railroad was to be built. They came to me, and wanted to put me down for a hundred shares. They did not get me on for but fifty.

Then, when they wanted to start the new bank, they came to me again, and fairly urged me to take five thousand dollars of stock. Five—thousand—dollars, out of an old country doctor. They said so much I took it. And it's always so; it's always so. You want a hundred dollars, you say?"

Yes, sir," said Mr. Gladstone, rightly judging that the laconic style would serve him best under the circumstances.

"It is about that interest on the mortgage, I suppose?"

The doctor had taken out his old morocco pocket-book—"wallet" he called it—and was counting over a roll of bills as he spoke.

"The same," said Abraham.

"I hoped you'd be able to raise that without borrowing. It was a hard blow to you, a—mighty—hard—blow; and I want to live to see you set the matter right again. You'll do it, with patience and good management. I'm sorry you've got to borrow. Not but what I'm willing to lend. I knew your father and your grandfather. He was a pretty old man when I began to ride in my sulky; but I remember him well. That's just a hundred, I believe—you can count it—guess you'll find it all right. He was a pretty old man, but he was a good man and a just man. I shouldn't have looked for any of his race to do the thing your father did. However, that's all gone by. What you have to do is to work hard, and keep out of debt—if—you—can."

"Good advice," said Abraham, with the air of a man who is striving to be cheerful in the face of a mortal pain. "Good advice, but not always easy to follow."

"No," said the doctor, with a humorous twinkle in his gray eyes. "Burns has it:

'When awful Beauty summons all her charms,
Who is so rash as rise in rebel arms?'

I suppose, when a man is married, he is n't always sure of himself. Now, is n't that the case, Abraham?"

"It may be true of some men," said Abraham, the forced composure of his face unsettling itself in a way that told the doctor all that he cared to know. "Have you a pen handy? I'd like to give you a note for this."

"Yes," said the doctor; "I'll write the note. I didn't ask you how long you wanted the money."

"I hope to be able to return it next week."

"Very well; then, we'll make it short time, say fifteen days.. I shouldn't have used the money in that time, so we won't say anything about interest on this note. If, at the end of that time, you want to renew, why I shall have to charge you the legal rate; but for this note, it's no matter."

Abraham attempted to insist that he would accept no such favor, but the doctor was firm. He had known Abraham's grandfather, had liked him, and that settled it. Furthermore, the doctor had satisfied himself of the reason of Abraham's unfortunate necessity. As the latter, with many thanks, bade him good morning and closed the door, the old man soliloquized:

"It's my opinion she does make him stand up and—read—*awfully*."

Half a mile out of the town was the old Gladstone place. It was a fine estate, and had remained in possession of the same family for four generations. For a hundred years, therefore, the Gladstones had been honorably identified with the local interests of Wyndham. The grandfather of Abraham had been a judge of the county court, and his father, though following no profession, and spending his days as a quiet agriculturalist, had held many offices of trust and responsibility, both in town and county. His first wife had died childless, a few years after their marriage. He remained a widower for several years, but, at

the age of forty, married again; the lady of his choice being a widow, of gentle breeding and amiable disposition. She brought with her, to her new home, a son by her first marriage, a child of two or three years. Abraham's birth occurred during the first year; so that the two boys grew up together so much like brothers, that, until they were nearly grown, they scarcely felt that there was any distinction between them. But the elder of the two proved to have inherited a very different character from that of his half brother. He had always been an ambitious, head-strong child, and had caused his mother many forebodings. Manhood, instead of softening and refining him, as she had hoped it might, seemed only to develop and intensify his violence and selfishness. He was handsome, cultivated, with a haughty, imperious manner, which, at a distance, was quite imposing; but his moral nature seemed in hopeless subjection to vices.

At twenty-one, having finished the education which the generosity of his step-father had bestowed upon him, he left home to pursue his fortunes. Abraham had chosen the profession of his grandfather, was in due time admitted to the bar, and soon after married Melissa Bowditch, a pretty blonde, of manners unusually quiet and self-possessed, and, in the popular estimation, a paragon of virtue, the epitome of all the saintly graces. But the little woman proved to have her whims, one of which involved a long pleasure tour, and a few weeks at a fashionable summer resort. During the absence of the young people, old Mr. Gladstone was taken ill; not dangerously, but still so seriously that his step-son, hearing the state of affairs, came home to attend him. Unexpectedly to all, the old gentleman's illness assumed an alarming form, and before Abraham and his wife could reach home he was quite beyond help, nearly senseless, indeed.

After his death, it was found that, during Abraham's

absence, he had made a will, by which his heir was burdened with a legacy to his half-brother, which, together with the unfortunate issue of certain speculations, would oblige him to mortgage the estate for by far the greater part of its value. There were plenty of friends to advise Abraham to contest the will; but the young man had sustained a great blow in the death of his then only remaining parent. To his tender conscience it seemed almost a crime that he should have been absent during his father's last days; a crime but too slightly expiated by the sacrifice of the half of his fortune. He had, too, a sense of personal honor, both rare and fine, which forbade him utterly to regret, much less to strive to undermine, the good fortune of his half-brother. These events, it is true, struck a gloom over his whole life; but he, nevertheless, prepared at once to close the old house, every room of which was dear to him, and remove to a small tenement in the village, where, unencumbered by the care of his farm, which he had rented to a responsible tenant, he might devote himself rigorously to the duties of his profession.

All this was sad enough, in itself, but the deeper misfortune of his life Abraham Gladstone bore in uncomplaining silence. He was a man to meet trouble bravely, with essentially masculine fortitude and strength. Let only his home fire burn brightly, grant him but that sanctuary from earthly care, that shekinah of heaven's peace, the shelter of a true woman's love, and he would have faced adversity not only boldly but cheerfully, and with joyous courage.

Those who knew Abraham Gladstone well, felt, though they were never told, that he had failed of this blessing.

V.

A WOMAN WHO WAS NOT STRONG-MINDED.

Mrs. Abraham Gladstone was a small, blonde woman, of a not uncommon type. Her features were delicate, and not devoid of beauty. Her figure was slight, but not angular. It had even a sort of roundness, which, at least when she was well made up, gave her some show of personal comeliness. I am particular about this point, because the least detracting from her muscular and adipose tissues would have indicated a nervousness of temperament which she did not possess, and the slightest addition thereto would have given a strength of fiber also foreign to her nature. In mental characteristics she steered equally clear of extremes. To creative power she made no pretension, but her perceptions were acute, and, in certain small matters, she was distinguished by a nice discernment, and a patient faculty of imitation, both rare and admirable. These gifts indicated her true sphere of endeavor, and, with proper moral and affectional balance, she might have filled a most useful, if not conspicuous position in the world.

The typical characteristic of all such women is, that while they are defective in energy or power to do for themselves, they have a certain not very delicate craft, united to a most dogged persistency, which compels others, out of sheer weariness, to do for them whatever needs force, or broad capacity, or will. They will give, in return, great largesse of their small wares, and so make good wives for strong handed, domineering men. I always thought the Savior had a small, blonde woman in his eye, when he spoke the parable of the Unjust Judge.

To the characteristics of her class, Mrs. Gladstone added some purely personal qualities, which will develop themselves hereafter. For the rest, she was the only child of a widow, who, during the lifetime of her husband, had been able to live in a style bordering on elegance. At his death, however, she had found herself much reduced in means, and when, shortly after, Abraham Gladstone had proposed for the hand of Melissa, it had been regarded, by both mother and daughter, as a most fortunate circumstance. Could any prophet have revealed to their gaze the events of the next few years, it is quite possible that their decision might have been reversed; though, as eligible matches were somewhat scarce in the vicinity, and Melissa's attractions not by any means overpowering, it is also possible that she would have taken the chances, although, no doubt, with vastly diminished self-gratulations.

As it was, she entered into the contract. After the change in affairs, nothing was left to her but to see to it that she exacted as much as possible of the original price. She had shed a great many tears and been seriously threatened with a decline, when the subject of shutting up the great house, and removing to the small one in the village, had been discussed, but all to no purpose. On this point Abraham was inflexible. His entire style of living must be changed; to do it successfully, he must commence at the foundation, and renounce, at least for the time, all the prestige of the old place and its associations, which, dear as they might be and were to him, would yet prove so many taxes upon his income. Besides that, he was to become a business man, and he must live near his business. He could now afford to keep no horse, and it was a long walk from his office to the old mansion. He had, at first, insisted that Melissa should employ a well trained servant, and, indeed, would have much preferred that she should do so. But that lady, after a few

months trial, herself decided to relinquish the luxury, and keep instead a little bound girl, about ten years old, partly to make a martyr of herself, in the eyes of her neighbors, and partly because she found the difference in cost of great aid in her personal expenditures.

The one strong thing in Mrs. Gladstone's character, was her love of dress. This was the Moloch to which everything else, even the holiest and tenderest emotions of her nature, were sacrificed. Yet she never gossiped about dress, as some women do; in fact, she never gossiped in a gossiping way about anything. It is true that she knew the exact contents of the wardrobe of every woman in town, if it were a fact at all worth knowing, and could tell, to a farthing, the cost of any separate article; but a habit of silent observation, or still more wary listening, or, as the utmost extent of her visible effort, the knack of putting exactly the right question in exactly the right place, accounted for this.

On the same day when, as we have seen, her husband was reduced to so unpleasant a financial strait, Mrs. Abraham Gladstone sat in her small sitting-room, in high consultation with her dress-maker. A pattern of elegant silk lay upon the table, and was evidently the article under discussion.

"Nothing less than web velvet, the exact shade, will do for the trimming," said Miss Burdick, emphatically. "A band around the skirt, now—say half a yard wide—would be el-e-gant. It would cost a good deal, though."

"It might be trimmed with lace," said Mrs. Gladstone.

"But the skirt?" queried Miss Burdick; "narrow lace is not elegant on a skirt."

"A lace flounce, then."

Miss Burdick was silent, evidently astonished.

"There isn't a lace flounce in this town," she said.

Mrs. Gladstone was not in the least moved by this asser-

tion, but rose quietly, went to her upper bureau drawer, and took therefrom a small package. Sitting down again, she unfolded it, and displayed to the astonished eyes of Miss Burdick the very thing in question, a moderately wide flounce, of real, unquestionable Brussels lace.

"Well, Mrs. Gladstone, but you are the beater. Where did you get it?"

At this juncture the door opened, and Mrs. Bowditch entered. She spied the dress pattern upon the table, and exclaimed:

"What, another new silk dress, Melissa? And how handsome! Just your shade of blue, exactly! Where did you get it? Parker hasn't had such a piece of goods as that for six months, I know."

"I sent down to New York, by him, for it, just before Christmas," said Mrs. Gladstone, quietly.

"And you've had it in the house all this time, and never told me. What a sly thing you are."

Mrs. Bowditch laughed, and looked merry, as if to be a sly thing were the greatest distinction upon which one could be complimented.

"But you hav'n't seen the wonder of all," interrupted Miss Burdick, who was aching to learn by what means that lace flounce got into Mrs. Gladstone's possession. "Look at that!"

Mrs. Bowditch looked—held up her hands—exclaimed:

"Well, I never! Melissa Bowditch, where did you get it?"

"Just the very words I said," ejaculated Miss Burdick. "There ain't another woman in town would have thought of such a thing."

"You're mistaken there," said Mrs. Gladstone, quietly. "The idea isn't original with me. I happened to know, though it was a great secret, that Mrs. Ellery bought this flounce the last time she went to New York, before the

Judge died. Of course, when she went into mourning, she couldn't wear it, and as *she says*," with an emphasis that, from any other lips than the sweetly serene ones of Mrs. Gladstone, would have been spiteful, "that she never intends to resume colors again, of course she was willing to sell it, and at quite a bargain."

"What did you have to pay her?" asked Miss Burdick.

"A hundred dollars."

"A hundred dollars!" exclaimed Mrs. Bowditch. "Why, Melissa, how did you get the money out of Abraham?"

"It is a good deal to pay, to be sure, but then, it is real Brussels, and will last a lifetime. On the whole, I think it an excellent bargain, and so, I am sure, will Mr. Gladstone, when he sees it."

"Oh! then he don't know about it," said Miss Burdick, who was, to use a characteristic expression of her own, "on pins and needles."

"Mr. Gladstone has too much business to attend to, now-a-days, to be interested in the minutiae of my shopping. He generally makes me an allowance for household purposes, out of which I must manage to clothe myself. In our present straitened circumstances, I have, of course, to be, as a general thing, very economical. But he has made a good deal out of the Gleason case, and very naturally felt like making me some little present. Mr. Gladstone appreciates my trials."

"Well, I must say," said Miss Burdick, "I do think you have got the kindest husband in this town. I don't believe there's another man in it would have humored his wife so."

Mrs. Gladstone did not look in the least elated, but, on the contrary, rather resigned; as if Miss Burdick was far from comprehending the real state of the case—as indeed she was—and she, Mrs. Gladstone, was too uncomplaining a martyr to enlighten her.

Miss Burdick made an appointment for a day of next

week, and then took her leave, to electrify the gossips of the town with the information that Mrs. Gladstone had a new silk awaiting her scissors, which was to be trimmed with a real Brussels flounce.

"Well," said one, "I suppose she feels as if she ought to keep up her position in society as well as she can. It must be hard for her to give up so many things she used to be accustomed to; but, I must say, she bears it very quietly. She seems quite resigned."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said another, "for I really never could make out much about her. When she was Melissa Bowditch, she never was like other girls, frank and outspoken, you know; yet, if I ever suspected her, as I sometimes did, of being the slyest, craftiest jade that ever lived, the very next time I saw her she was sure to be so sweet, so serene, so, as you say, 'resigned,' that I was ready to put myself to torture for having judged her so harshly. I always did think, I'm sure I don't know why, that she married Gladstone for his money, and when it came out that he had lost his fortune, I expected she'd be terribly cut up; but if she was, she has kept it mightily to herself. The only line she ever gives one to measure her afflictions with, is the length of her submissive face."

There was a laugh, but nobody dissented from this certainly not very flattering estimate.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Bowditch was diving more deeply into the mystery of the lace flounce.

"Melissa," she said, "you must have about worried Abraham to death before he gave you that money. How did you get it out of him?"

"I don't know that I've worried him particularly. He knows very well that if I am to go into society at all, I must have clothes to wear, and I fancy he don't care to see me make a recluse of myself."

"Oh!" said the mother, new light breaking at once into her mind. "That's why you didn't go to Mrs. Smith's party last winter, nor Mrs. Darrell's, nor to church for the last month. Well, I declare, Mellie, you are a schemer. It takes you to turn that man around your little finger. How many times a day have you reminded him of that money, for the last three months; on the average, I mean?"

"As nearly as I can judge," said Mrs. Gladstone, oh! so very quietly, "about three. I've had to work rather harder than I ever did before, but *I've got it.*"

"I'd like to see the thing you wouldn't get, if you set your heart on it. I wonder if you could manage all men as you do him. I'm inclined to think some of them would tell you to hold your tongue."

"Very well. Talking is not my forte. I prefer silence."

Mrs. Bowditch understood this perfectly. The memory still remained to her of times in Melissa's maiden days, when she had been refused a new bonnet or a darling pocket handkerchief, and had made the house redolent of injured innocence for days thereafter. Therefore, fearful of wounding the dear creature's sensibilities, she pursued the subject no further, but turned to a more edifying one.

"Where is dear little Echo?" she asked. Echo was a pet poodle. If there was anything in life which Mrs. Gladstone loved, and about which she sentimentalized, it was Echo. It could not have been his beauty which made him so dear, for he was decidedly ugly, even for a poodle; it could not have been his meek disposition, for he snapped and snarled at everybody, except his dotting mistress, and even she was not always sure of his favor. I think the truth was this. The woman had, would have, no children. She had often assured Mr. Gladstone that children were too expensive a luxury to be indulged in by people in their circumstances. Her family physician had

even his grave suspicions that her hands were not guiltless of innocent blood; for be it known to you, O unenlightened reader, that thousands of delicate American females, who would shriek if a fly were crushed in their presence, have no such compunctions where their own offspring are concerned, but, if they can do it without publicity, will unrelentingly slay them in cold blood. Of these women Mrs. Gladstone was one; a quiet, delicate, saintly murderess.

And yet, so tender and so true is nature, in spite of all her seeming cruelties and contradictions, that this woman, too selfish to be a mother, too little tender toward her own flesh to shrink from its destruction, still felt maternal longings. It was fitting that such a woman, surely not worthy to become the mother of an immortal being, should take to her unmaternal bosom—a dog.

And so Echo became a pet.

Let us not be too severe. Mrs. Gladstone's heart was full of kindness toward her darling, mistaken kindness though it were. Quite unconsciously to herself, she bore many of the anxieties, and something of the labors of a real mother. She washed and curled her Echo every morning. She prepared his food with the utmost care. She kept continual watch over him, lest he should be misused by other dogs, or led astray by malicious village children. If the night were cold, she arose at its coldest hour to put more covering on his bed. If he were ill, she administered medicine, and watched over him with tender solicitude. In so far as she shared a mother's sacred labors, let us hope she gained, in her own bosom at least, a mother's rewards; since it is surely better to be tender and solicitous for a dog, than never to be tender and solicitous at all. But, oh! ye loving, happy mothers, pity even while you condemn a love so low, so misdirected.

Mrs. Bowditch, who sympathized in her daughter's

aversion to children, sympathized, also, in her fondness for Echo. In answer to her inquiry, he was duly produced.

"The dear little creature, how sweet he looks," she exclaimed.

In answer to which compliment, accompanied by a pat on the head, Echo snapped and snarled most viciously.

"Poor Echo! he don't know who it is he's barking at. He thinks it's a naughty boy going to take him away from his mistress, don't he?" which was the convenient fiction by which his caprices were excused. But his continued ill conduct exhausted even Mrs. Bowditch's grandmotherly fondness at last, and she gave him a little pat on the head, which was not intended as a love pat, whereupon Echo ran yelping to his mistress's arms. Mrs. Gladstone was austere silent, but the cloud upon her brow darkened the sunshine in that room during all the remainder of her mother's visit.

Matters having thus taken an inauspicious turn, Mrs. Bowditch fell back from the pitch of momentary enthusiasm produced by the lace flounce to her ordinary tone of complaining and fault-finding.

An old woman! What more desolate phrase, if one has the picture of a creature like Mrs. Bowditch before one's eyes. Wrinkled, dried, ugly, the bloom and freshness of youth all gone, and no trace of rich and mellow maturity left behind; the eye faded and sunken, with no inner light to retrieve its lost glory; the lip pale and dewless, with no rare smiling curve to win, at last, one's admiration and love. The wifely tenderness all stilled from those aged pulses, and the sweet, late enthusiasm of age not there to take its place; the maternal fountains shrunk and perished, and no universal motherhood aglow in the soul, to make the whole form and countenance luminous with love. An old man, who has left behind him the strength and passion of his youth, is pitiable; but

to him has never come the unspeakable tenderness and beauty of a woman's life; to him could never come the serene, immortal halo which should be hers in old age. Therefore, of all death-in-life is none so ghastly, so desolate as a loveless, unlovely old woman.

In the cool damp of the spring twilight, Abraham Gladstone walked out to the old place. It had been a hard day with him, and he felt a longing for the sweet, though mournful associations of the spot. The necessity of overlooking some repairs going on at the time, gave him a pretense, and, while the redness of day still lingered in the western sky, he entered the familiar gates.

A fine avenue, shaded by a thick growth of evergreens, led up to the house, which was built in the style of fifty years ago; a broad, square structure, with carved friezes and pillared portico. Here and there modern devices spoke of renovation; a bay window at one side, a balcony over the wing door, and, at the opposite side, a long piazza, with trellised vines; but the general effect was ancient, and not modern. A group of noble elms surrounding it, gave it an added dignity; and, with all its seams and scars, and marks of age, concealed by the softly luminous dusk, it seemed as fair a spot as the fancy could wish to dwell upon. The grounds about it had been arranged with evident taste. There was a well kept lawn, of wide extent, upon which noble trees stood, singly or in groups. Far to the right a dark clump of evergreens offered seclusion to the sentimentally inclined, while, at the left, ran a pretty brook, spanned by a rustic bridge, overhung by willows, and losing itself at last in an artificial fish-pond, upon which, in former times, a tiny boat had floated. Beyond stretched the rolling meadows, and softly undulating fields, and heavy woodlands, which made up the estate.

Every rood of this ground was dear to Abraham Gladstone's heart; with each some reminiscence of his youth

was associated. As his feet pressed the familiar sod, his heart was thrilled with the pride of ownership. It would be the work of many a year, he felt, to clear off the heavy mortgage which encumbered it; and which, till then, must keep its unrelenting, death-like hold upon—not these acres, but his very life. But he felt a man's strength and endurance in his frame, a steady, indomitable will, a resistless energy in his brain, to do, and dare, and suffer to the utmost for the thing he held dearest in his life—these paternal acres, this home, which had once been his mother's.

Ah! that was it. The struggle of man with man, for bread, wears out enthusiasm and inspiration very fast. Coming out of his office that night, Abraham had felt very poor, very purposeless, very worthless. His step had halted, his head had drooped, the languor of weariness and discouragement had pervaded every fiber. There was no inspiration in his home. It was folly to think of rest and recreation there. He had long ago ceased to dream of finding what his soul needed in wedded life; long ago proved that men cannot gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; but, on his solitary way, that evening, he had dreamed of a baby face pressed close to his, of soft, pink fingers, twined in his hair, of a breath sweet as June roses warming his face. His heart had ached, as childless, desolate men's hearts often do ache, for the winsome ways and innocent caresses of infancy. It was a dream, sacred, because so far from being realized; he would have owned it to no man. The tears which sprang unbidden to his eyes, he brushed hastily away, as if he were ashamed of them; but none the less his heart was weighed down with unutterable sadness and desolation.

But here, on this familiar lawn, an angel met him—breathed inspiration, courage, love, which is life, into his veins. No angel was it of the upper heavens, the incon-

ceivable, unapproachable depths of Being; but the spirit of a woman, earth-born, the dear, touching, trembling memory of his mother; she who had been his refuge in every childish trouble, his strength in every youthful discouragement, the inspirer of all noble ambition, the pride of his eyes, the delight of his heart; so tender, so patient, so forgiving, so never-failing in love and faith. The stars looked down upon him with her soft eyes; the dusk was brightened by her beaming smile; the night breeze whispered with her tender tones. His eye grew brighter as he went about his work, his step more elastic; he had kept a tryst with love. His spirit was gladdened, the cares of the day were exorcised, and he went home another man from him who had walked that way an hour before, silent and sorrowing.

"I'm glad Abraham feels so cheerful to-night," said Mrs. Gladstone to her mother, as the latter was getting ready to go home. "It isn't pleasant to have a man so glum about the house, as he often is. Nobody knows what I endure with him, at times. I thought, perhaps"—

"Was it about the money? Oh! men always do make a fuss about money; but, then, they get over it. Your father always did. I can tell you, I had my troubles in my time, as well as others. But you, with your tact for management, ought never to complain. I really think you've got Abraham into excellent subjection; and, depend upon it, my daughter, it's all they're fit for—men."

VI.

BUSINESS VS. LOVE MAKING.

I suppose there was not, in all Wyndham, a woman more envied than Mrs. Ralph Darrell. She had the finest house in town, built since her marriage, to meet exactly her tastes and her desires. It was surrounded by fine grounds; it was elegantly furnished. She kept her carriage, and her wardrobe, if she chose, might fairly outrival that of the wife of the member of Congress, which was glory enough, in that line. Her children were fine looking, healthy, promising; her husband handsome, agreeable, indulgent. He was proud of her; he would even have loved her, if he had time. As it was, he was putting off that luxury till he should have amassed a fortune; not that he would have admitted, now, that he did not love her. Quite the contrary; it was only that during his courtship he had found the constant studying, and remembering, and catering to a woman's tastes, however delightful in itself, a heavy draft upon the time and energies of a businessman. Of course it must be done then; but now, with his wife secured, and all done for her that money could do, he could no longer afford himself or her that luxury. He cherished a dream—without ever mentioning it, for American business men are not given to talking sentiment—of a time when he should have fully gratified his ambition, and should have leisure to enjoy the society of his wife. I even think that this dream was at times the secret spring and inspiration of his best efforts in that direction. His mistake lay in that he forgot that opportunities come but once; that life never stands still, and that, while he was neglecting to keep at one with his wife, heart-beat for

heart-beat, life-stroke for life-stroke, waiting for that more convenient season, they were walking apart, and growing apart. He lived alone in his business, and she lived alone in her home. And that was Mrs. Ralph Darrell's skeleton.

But, apart from this, a cloud was settling over the house. She came down from her nursery to the breakfast table with a troubled brow.

"Ralph," she said, "I think you had better stop at the doctor's on your way down town, and tell him to come up. Baby seems quite sick, and Mabel complains of a sore throat. I am afraid they are going to have scarlet fever."

"I guess you are a little nervous," he said, abstractedly. "They seemed well enough last night; however, I'll notify the doctor if you wish, and I don't forget it. The safe way is to tell John, and let him stop as he comes back from driving me down town. I'm in a great hurry."

Mrs. Darrell was not nervous in the sense in which her husband used the word; but she was deeply troubled. The scarlet fever was rife in the neighborhood, and with the experienced eye of a mother who had carried two children safely through it, she felt certain that her babes were already attacked with the dreadful disease, and one at least severely. She was a woman of strong mind and good courage; but when her children were threatened she had a woman's trembling, apprehensive heart, and longed for, *needed* a word of steady, masculine encouragement and sympathy. It was for this reason that she had spoken to her husband, instead of sending a servant at once for the doctor. She had asked for bread and received a stone, and she was not the woman to ask twice.

So John went for the doctor; and he, when he came, confirmed her worst apprehensions. At dinner, therefore, she said again:

"The children have the scarlet fever, Ralph. Will you come up and see them?"

Mr. Darrell looked at his watch. I've hardly time now, Laura; to-night will do as well. Don't be nervous, dear; the other children got through safely, and with your good nursing and the doctor's excellent care, I've no fears; and you must not have. I'm rather unusually busy just now, and if it promises to be a long siege you must hunt up somebody to help you. I don't believe Annie is very capable, and I'd just discharge her and get somebody else. Do anything you like, only don't bother me."

So the burden that was already heavy enough, was doubled when he threw his own share upon her also. Laura turned away with dry eyes, but a sinking heart.

But the doctor knew a woman's wants better. "Laura," he said, "how are you going to get along? Annie isn't much to depend upon, and you will need good help before you get through."

"I do not know," she said, absently. "Girls are very scarce now; they all go into the mills. I don't know where I could find one that would do better than Annie. If I knew of any experienced nurse I should be glad to hire her, but there does not seem to *be* anybody."

"H'm! h'm!" said the doctor, whistling and meditating.

"I know of a woman I think I could get for you. She's a good nurse, and I'm inclined to think not a bad woman. That's about all I do know about her; but if I were in your place I should rather risk her than Annie. Can't—tell—what—she—may—turn—out—to be, but you might try her."

"Very well," said Mrs. Darrell, "if you think I had better send for her, I will do so."

"Perhaps I'd better see her myself first," said the doctor, cautiously. "If I can get her, I'll send her up to you before night."

The success of his mission the reader already knows.

The room into which Rebecca was shown when she

arrived at Mrs. Darrell's was the library. It was a small, cosy apartment, furnished in green, the walls fitted with book shelves, with fine busts over the doors and windows. The only picture in the room was a life-size portrait of Mrs. Darrell, hanging over the mantel.

It was several minutes before that lady made her appearance, and Rebecca spent the time in studying the noble and beautiful face, which she instantly divined was that of the mistress of the mansion. The brow was broad and smooth, not too prominent in either the upper or lower portion; the softly waving hair, dark and glossy, was coiled in heavy masses at the back of the head, while a single curl fell on either shoulder; the features were regular, and the whole organization of a breadth and fullness which indicated that rare union,—a cool, wise head, a strong, true heart. But it was upon the eyes that Rebecca lingered longest; a soft, clear gray in color, there was still a light in them which seemed to shine out from deep, interior worlds, where lay resolved the elements of infinite things. They were eyes that saw nothing in a frivolous or superficial way; but which looked easily and naturally to the heart and core of mysteries. Eyes of untold knowledge, of untold power, yet shining with a ray so softly human, so tenderly winning, that they compelled less your reverence and admiration than your sympathy and love. The accessories were, as they should be, very simple; a plain, white dress, fastened at the throat with a garnet pin; nothing to detract from the simple power and purity of the lovely face, which was, among common faces, as the queen of roses among way-side weeds.

Rebecca had scarcely finished her analysis of it, had not at all ceased wondering if it were possible for a living woman to be the peer of it in beauty and strength, when the door opened and Mrs. Darrell entered; the exact

counterpart of her portrait, except that for the white dress was substituted a printed cashmere wrapper, of which the ground tone was a soft shade of green.

Mrs. Darrell had expected to meet an ordinary servant girl; if foreign, possibly neat and womanly in her appearance; but, if American, most certainly coarse and rude; for none but the lower classes of American women are now to be found in the ranks of domestic servants. Instead of this she saw before her a slight, but well formed young woman, of medium height, with possibly an added inch. Her features were delicate; her hair and eyes, exactly matched in color, were of a rich, reddish brown, as rare as it is lovely, and which is never found except with a skin of that peculiar softness and transparency which can only be likened to a rose-tinted pearl shell. Her dress was plain, but perfectly neat and lady-like; and, but for a strange, indescribable expression of countenance, which dimly reminded one of delicate vines with dewy blossoms and clinging tendrils, torn, and drenched, and shattered in a thunder gust; of bright-winged, song-loving birds of the tropics, afloat on stormy seas, drowned in the acrid saltiness of the spray, and tossed from wave to wave, the picture of cruel desolation and hopeless, helpless ruin; but for this sad, unfathomable look, she might have been the most refined and lovable of Mrs. Darrell's elegant neighbors, dropped in to pay a morning call.

A little of the surprise which that lady felt was visible upon her countenance.

"Is this Rebecca March?" she said, as if fearing a mistake.

"Yes, madam."

"You are, then, I understand, seeking employment as a nurse girl?"

"Doctor Gaines informed me that you needed the services of such a person," was the somewhat evasive

reply, "and was kind enough to give me the preference."

"Are you accustomed to going out to service?"

Rebecca meant to be very calm, very stoical; the flush which mounted to her face was quite involuntary, but it made Mrs. Darrell regret her question, and resolve to be more careful in the future.

"I have not always been a servant," she said, "but circumstances have thrown me upon my own resources, and I am quite willing to accept any employment which will give me a home and the necessaries of life. I hope to be able to please you."

"Are you accustomed to the care of children—sick children?"

"Not very much," was the reply; "but that is something which a woman ought to learn easily. I am fond of children, madam."

"That is certainly a great deal in your favor. You can wash and dress them, I suppose; and exercise a gentle, and at the same time firm, restraint over them."

"I hope to give you satisfaction in these respects."

"My brother has perhaps told you that I have two children sick with scarlet fever. The youngest, my little Ralph, has always been a delicate child. All through the winter he has been a constant care, and the disease is already developing itself in so violent a form that I have very grave apprehensions. Mabel is less severely attacked, and I hope, with sufficient care and good nursing, may get through safely; but for this, I shall be obliged to trust in a great measure to you, for Ralph occupies almost every minute of my time. It is a serious responsibility for any one to undertake; but if I find in you all that your appearance leads me to hope, there need be no present mention of wages between us. Whatever you ask will be cheerfully paid."

"I shall do my best to serve you," said Rebecca, quietly, but with a manner that signified more than her words. "As for wages, whatever you have been in the habit of paying will be quite satisfactory to me."

"Mrs. Darrell then led the way to the nursery, where Rebecca, having divested herself of her outer garments, commenced the task of becoming acquainted with her work.

In a large, neatly furnished, and ordinarily well lighted, but now darkened room, the little sufferers lay; Mabel on the low bed, Ralph in his little crib. There were bottles, and spoons, and cups about, and the necessary appliances for bathing; but, with all, there was no untidiness or disorder. A door, opening into an adjoining room, furnished a sure supply of fresh air, and the stillness was only broken by the low moans of the restless, suffering babes. The other two children, Rebecca learned, were Maude, a girl of twelve, and Evelyn, six years old. These, for the present, would be very little in the nursery, and Rebecca's principal charge would be to sit by Mabel, attend to her wants, administer medicine, and be in readiness, always, to assist Mrs. Darrell in the care of Ralph. Mrs. Darrell had a horror of strangers in her nursery, besides being scrupulous about scattering the infection, and proposed that, as long as they could endure it, they should sleep on alternate nights. It proved, indeed, that she was too true a mother to leave her suffering child at all, so long as nature could hold out; but caught, now and then, a snatch of sleep, to make further endurance just possible.

"I am quite alone," she said, "and shall be obliged to depend altogether upon you; for my sister Joanna, always an invalid, and most unfit, by want of experience, for the care of sick children, has now a little pet of her own, by adoption, and the doctor is fearful of infection. Mother would otherwise come in occasionally, though she is too

old for the active labors of the sick-room. As it is, I shall not send for them, except in case of emergency. The neighbors are all kind, but we will do by ourselves as long as we can."

Rebecca had a loyal heart, and she was by this time so charmed with this nature before her, at once so tender and so strong, that she hailed the compact with joy. It seemed to her, lacking naturally in courage and daring, so brave and noble a thing to do, to meet and engage, single handed, the grim destroyer. She accepted her part of the labor with such quiet zeal and fidelity, that Mrs. Darrell was at once inspired with confidence and trust, and before the day closed was thanking heaven for sending this unlooked for bounty, this woman, who was at once a trusty assistant and a sympathizing friend.

The doctor came in frequently, and, in a quiet way, made many observations. If he had been foiled in finding out what this woman had been, he was in a fair way to determine what she was. But things worked very smoothly, and the doctor found himself imperceptibly losing interest in his self-imposed espionage, as the character of Rebecca developed, day by day before his eyes, into a quiet, unobtrusive symmetry and beauty.

VII.

“THEY TWAIN SHALL BE ONE FLESH.”

Mr. Darrell visited the nursery regularly three times a day, speaking gently to the little sufferers, making suggestions for their comfort, awarding a word or two of sympathy and encouragement to his wife, and then he was off to his business again. In the evening he had the papers to read, and when night came he was fatigued and in want of rest.

“Get all the help you need,” he said to his wife, “but don’t ask me to sit up. I am not fitted for it; it isn’t my business.”

At noon of the third day he came to her with rather more than his usual anxiety.

“How are the children to-day?” he asked.

Mabel seemed no worse; her case was hopeful, and she told him so.

“But the baby, oh! Ralph,” she said, “the baby is very sick.”

“That child has always been so much more care than the others,” he said, “that I think you worry about him unnecessarily. He doesn’t seem to me so much worse than Mabel. He even seems quieter, not in so much distress.”

She was silent; his eye and hand were so untrained to sickness, how could she make him understand that what he saw was the feebleness of nature, which could make no moan.

“I wanted to go to New York to-night,” he said. “It is very necessary to my business. Indeed, not to go would derange my plans for the whole season. I shall go

down to-night and back to-morrow night, so that I should be gone barely thirty-six hours. Of course, if you insist on my staying, I shall do so; but it will be a serious disadvantage to me."

Laura's eyes—those eyes with infinite meanings in them—were looking into vacancy.

"Oh, Ralph!" she said, "can I go through with this alone?"

"It is only a day, love, and the fever has not yet reached its crisis."

A weaker woman, a woman less unselfish, would have clung to him, and with tears and entreaties, would have made his going impossible. I do not say that she would have been wrong; but this I know, it was out of grander deeps than such women can conceive, or than most men can appreciate truly, that Laura's reply came.

"Go, if you must, my husband. Whatever comes, with God's help I can bear it."

He left her, and Laura went back to the cradle of her sick babe. The fevered flesh, the glassy eye, the painful breathing, all appealed to her as they had never done before. The doctor came in a few minutes later.

"Milton," she said, after she had told him of her husband's intention, "Milton, can't you persuade him not to go?"

"Laura," said the doctor, "if he can look in your face and go, it isn't likely that anything I could say would stop him."

Stirring business men like Mr. Darrell sometimes failed of respect for the doctor, and he felt it. Let them but have a cramp, or a twinge of rheumatism, and he straightway had his revenge. But in this case, all the more because he was Laura Darrell's brother, he was slow to interfere.

So Mr. Darrell went to New York.

When he had kissed her good bye, and bidden her be

of good courage, for he would be back again very soon, Mrs. Darrell went to her nursery. The babe stirred from his heavy lethargy and put up his little hands from the crib imploringly. Tears, bitter and blinding, started from Laura's eyes, as she held her darling to her breast and felt the fever in his veins, the agonized throbbing in his brain, and the restless working of his limbs in mute distress.

Outside, the night was gathering dark and rainy. It seemed to Laura as if the clouds that shut out the stars, shut out heaven beside; as if that still, dark room, with its suffering occupants, had somehow drifted out of its rightful place in the universe of God, and was no longer cared for by Him. Part of this feeling of desolation and neglect was no doubt owing to the undue tension of her nervous system. The physical organization of woman is the most finely wrought and delicately adjusted instrument that ever came from the hands of its Maker. In its sensitiveness to pain or pleasure, its susceptibility, its infinite range of pure, delicate and spiritual uses, it is something so far removed from the coarser adaptations of masculine beings, that no man living can fully comprehend or sympathize with it. From the moment the girl becomes a woman, and still more, when the woman becomes a mother, she enters upon a range of experiences which are her sole and indefeasible possession. In every other experience, but those which belong solely to her womanly nature, her lover may follow her step by step, and their intercourse may be that of equals and co-workers; but here such equality and fellowship cease. Henceforth the male takes the secondary position.

He lays at her feet a few material elements; to these she adds the spiritualizing force, and creates out of billets of timber and blocks of stone that higher and vastly different thing—a home. With the product of a single

heart-throb, she peoples that home with immortal beings. Even then her work is but commenced. Through all the weary weeks and months of infancy, with their days of labor and corroding anxiety, their nights of ceaseless vigil and prayer, it is still she who must suffer, endure, and out of her own life nourish that new life on which, not to her only, but to the universe at large, all things depend. She is gifted thus with a creative faculty almost divine, and she has a self-sustaining power, too, almost divine. Almost, not quite. The rude physical strength which must go to her support, or else she fail, is stored in the larger frame and stronger muscles of man. It is his duty to transmute them, by smiles and caresses, and a constant, tender, endearing encouragement, into fiber of her fiber, life of her life. So only can she truly succeed in her great mission; so only people the world with new and ever finer races, and at the same time retain for herself and for man the graces and harmonies of her being.

This material succor was the food for which Laura Darrell was famishing. Refused those necessary supplies, she had no recourse but that of the pelican; she must tear the flesh from her own breast, rob her own life of its light, its warmth, its spiritual uplifting, to succor the failing life of her child.

So it was, that her own heavens grew dark, while she made a heaven of warmth, and tenderness, and love about her babe. Alas! alas! to how little purpose it seemed to her.

All night she held him in her arms, while the faithful Rebecca knelt at her feet and handed her in their turn the various appliances. Not for an instant did either of them relax their efforts, or when efforts ceased to avail, their watching; but steadily through the seemingly interminable watches of the night the little flame burned lower and lower in its socket.

The morning came, and with it the anxious doctor.

"Can he live?" murmured the stricken mother, the agony of renunciation quivering in her voice.

"Laura," said the doctor, looking away from her face lest he should see her pain, "it isn't best to look for life when death is the only thing to pray for. The child's brain is spoilt."

Did no echo of this doom break upon the father's ear as he trod the pavements of Wall street? Or was his spiritual sense so dull that the voiceless intimations of the air could not reach it? He achieved a skillful operation that day, by which, as he reckoned, he gained a decided advantage over his rivals in trade. Let us congratulate him upon it.

All through that long sunny day, the two faithful watchers strove, not to save now, only to comfort and shield from unnecessary pain the beloved sufferer. As the evening drew near, it was plain that the crisis approached. The heavens still shut down dark and appalling over Laura's heart, but into their gloomy obscurity she launched that constant prayer:

"If he only can live till his father comes. Oh! God, how can I bear this stroke alone!"

The night closed down, the world grew still, the infinite depths of heaven revealed the stars. Still the mother sat in the low nursery chair, which she had not left since her husband's step died out of the hall below.

"Rebecca," she said, "I cannot bear this any longer, my heart will break. Let me lay him in your lap. Oh! God of heaven, must my strength fail me at the last!"

There were no tears in her eyes; only a heavy, hopeless sorrow, too deep for tears. At that moment her mother entered the room; a calm, majestic woman, of a rarer beauty than any youth bestows.

"My daughter," she said, "a woman's strength can

never fail, because it is of the Highest. No other creature has the hold on heaven that a mother has.

"But He has forsaken me," moaned the anguish-stricken wife.

"*Never*, my child. If He has taken away every other support, it is that you may draw the more deeply from Him. 'Though he *slay* me, yet will I trust Him.'"

The house was still; the last inmate had retired to rest, but scarcely yet to sleep, when the heavenly gate opened. A light that was not of earth streamed across the baby face, the blue eyes opened in a maze of unearthly wonder and joy, and then closed again forever.

The world that hitherto had seemed reeling about her, steadied itself underneath the poor mother's feet. She could not yet see her Father's face, she could not hear his voice, but through the chaotic darkness she felt his arm.

Herself, she brought the baby robes and helped to put them on. Herself smoothed the sunny hair, each thread of it more dear to her than gold of Ophir. Herself straightened the rounded, dimpled limbs. When all was done, and the room put into that order which women love so well, the elder mother took the Bible, and read in a calm though tremulous tone, first the touching story of David's bereavement, and then the tender, trustful strains of the twenty-third psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; * * * yea, though I walk through the valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

The moment Laura had dreaded came at last. There was no evading it, no putting it off for any other duty. The day was done, the night had come. Her bed awaited her.

Oh! lonely bed; oh! couch of bitter desolation and reproach. No babe, no husband. Where should her

head repose, where should she lay her empty, yearning arms. Her frame was weary to exhaustion, but here was no rest. Her spirit fainted for succor, but here was no wine of consolation. In her agony, she threw her arms about her faithful friend, and begged her not to leave her. Sleep there was none for her, but the comfort of speech she might have if Rebecca would sit by her bedside.

They watched the long night through, the lonely mother going by herself again and again to visit the little casket, to see, as she said, in her wandering, half-demented speech, that the dear child wanted nothing—oh! madness known only to mothers, the madness of care, and tenderness and solicitude that will not be appeased, when the tenderness of heaven has replaced its own—and coming back again to recount to her patient listener all the bitter-sweet reminiscences of the beloved babyhood, which crowded her brain with such yearning and regret.

After the daylight broke, a drowsiness seized her brain, and for a few moments she slumbered. Then she arose, dressed herself carefully, and prepared to meet her husband.

Of his dismay and heartfelt agony it boots not now to tell. The after story will test the quality of his grief. He lavished money upon the funeral rites. There was a little white coffin with silver nails and plate of burnished brightness; there were flowers in profusion, and a robe of daintiest texture and device. He consoled himself also with saying that his presence after all could have made no difference with the result; the sorrow must have come just as certainly and surely. He dwelt upon his grief in not seeing that dear face once again in life, and thought his penalty was greater than he could bear. But the loss he could least afford to suffer was one which he scarcely measured at all—the loss of an opportunity to bind his wife's heart to him, by what would have been a

dearer tie than even the birth of that only boy. And the loss was irretrievable. She had felt a want which it was his place to fill, and he had not been there to fill it. She had gone through an experience which, if he had shared it, would have linked their souls together by a bond which should have been indissoluble through all eternity; but in those deep throes of expectation and despair he had had no portion.

In God's great universe of love there is no loss. One of His houseless, homeless ones gathered up the spilled contents of this most precious alabaster box, and not a drop was wasted. The woman who had wrestled through the watches of that awful night with Laura Darrell, was thereafter no stranger, no servant in any ignoble sense, but an equal, a friend, a never-to-be-forgotten benefactor.

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VIII.

SOME IDEAS CONCERNING "A WOMAN'S SPHERE."

It was in this spirit that Mrs. Darrell approached Rebecca, in regard to her future course. The latter was sitting in the nursery, sewing, and at the same time endeavoring to cheer, with an original fairy story, the loneliness of little Mabel, who was still confined to the house. If Rebecca had a talent at all, it was this one of amusing children. Her store of stories never failed; and whether they were inventions of her own, or retailed at second-hand, the manner was always original, and so suited to the tastes and circumstances of her listeners, that each felt that a personal favor was granted, or a personal application intended.

Mrs. Darrell, sitting in an easy chair by the window, looking out with the apparent listlessness, but real pre-occupation, which so often characterizes the manner of deeply bereaved persons, felt at last the magnetism of this steady flow of chatter, and interrupted her own thought to listen.

"Rebecca," she said at length, "why don't you write stories, and sell them? You might make your fortune."

"No, madam," said Rebecca, "my stories would never bear writing out."

"Not if you really set yourself about the work with the proper amount of determination?"

Rebecca smiled. "I think, madam, the smallest amount of 'determination,' as you say, would put every story out of my brain forever. I never think of stories, unless I have the listeners about me. The very idea of going away by myself to write one out, would imply a failure."

"Then you are purely an improvisatrice? I am sorry."

"Thank you, but I am not," said Rebecca, quietly.

"Have you, then, no ambition?"

"Very little of that kind. I would rather hold my gift, if I have one, for those I love."

"Yes, but pardon me, Rebecca, you seem to have your living to make."

"I shall never teach," said Rebecca, firmly but quietly, "even if I were fitted for it, which may be doubtful. That avocation, as well as the other of sewing, is so yourself, and working for your own advancement."

"But you might teach, and so be making a position for tented, I am happy. What more can I ask?"

the most gifted women to earn. I am more than contented, I am happy. What more can I ask? But you might teach, and so be making a position for myself. Of the few vocations open to women, I have, lived but a few weeks. I have, then, nobody to please but no ties, none whatever, outside this town, in which I have to with pleasure; but I may, at least, tell you that I have dependent as I. My history is not one which I ever refer better off I am than the majority of women, so perfectly "And I," she said, "have been thinking how much Rebecca looked up with a grateful smile.

thing so much higher." But I cannot help thinking you are fitted for some- as no one ever did before, in the way of household assist- you always with me, for you are doing me such service course, Rebecca, if I were selfish, I should want to keep to be quite satisfied with the way you are doing it. Of "Yes, earning it richly. But I am too truly your friend least, getting it?"

"And seem, too, just now, do I not, to be making it; at

crowded now, with those who have not enough pride, or else too much vanity, to be found doing anything that is not 'genteel,' that, for every one who succeeds, some other one must fail. Women have enough to struggle against in the world, without competing ruinously with each other. In my present position, I do not feel that I am standing in the place of any one else."

"No. Annie, who left me, went into the mills, and thinks herself much better off than when she was here."

"While the heat, the dirt, the noise, the coarse associations of the mills, are, to say the least, no way congenial to me."

"But Mr. Darrell is just now wanting an accountant in his office. How would that place suit you?"

"No better, at least for the present. There are women, and all honor to them, who feel themselves strong enough and pure enough to compete with men for such occupations. Just now I am very weary; I need rest, seclusion, a home; I am willing to give the best I have, the best, perhaps, that any woman has, in exchange for it; that is, patient, faithful, loving help. If, on these terms, you are willing to keep me, let us say no more about it."

"Shall I say that I still must think it rather a pity that you are not more ambitious?"

Rebecca's face grew a little sad. "Ambition," she said, "seems to me to have, somehow, gotten to mean greed. Mrs. Darrell, I am ambitious; not in the way which confounds all uses, and makes the more shining, and not the more essential ones, to be coveted. Without ever having thought much about it, I feel just this, that it is a great pity that women should have so generally adopted the masculine form of ambition, which has the luck, now, of ruling the world. A woman's ambition, it seems to me, should be, to be womanly."

"I like not that term," said Laura; "it is commonly

used to express something raw, immature; simply, I think, because of the state of rank unfinish in which woman has hitherto been kept."

"Very true. But how shall women ever attain the perfection of their type, except by constantly and conscientiously asserting its pure characteristics? When I see women, in their eagerness to progress—that is the word, I believe—simply aping men, I think of the spider crab, which, you know, walks backwards. If the best that woman can ever be is a weak imitation of man, heaven help the race."

Mrs. Darrell was listening with deep interest.

"You said you were ambitious," she said. "I am still waiting for an explanation of your meaning."

Rebecca smiled.

"Perhaps," she replied, "I have said more than I can substantiate. What I meant was simply this: I have my living to earn; that is a necessity, not an ambition. But if I could make a thousand dollars a year, by doing something which is essentially a man's business; by which I mean, something which necessitates a rude publicity; trafficking in a general way; steady, physical exertion, such as is incompatible with the delicacy of the female organism; or any business *which engages especially the selfish propensities*, I would regard it as utterly unfit for me, beneath my womanhood, beneath my ambition. On the contrary, what I will ever seek for, is an employment which, while it does not ignore physical exertion, yet calls principally into play the unselfish, emotional, religious, *womanly* feelings. A girl who loves to work in the mills, is not fit to have the care of children. That is a field for a true woman. I have been very wordy; have I made myself at all understood?"

"Perfectly, and have, besides, shown me how nature draws her line between the sexes; a thing I never clearly

saw before. That is why you would not like to be an accountant."

"The range of intellectual uses is middle-ground, common to both sexes; but I do think that sphere which I have mentioned as pertaining to woman exclusively, is still the higher one. Mrs. Darrell, I think a poet is not so noble as a mother."

"Shakspeare beside Mrs. Moss?"

"No; Shakspeare beside Mary of Nazareth, or even Mary, the mother of Washington. Any poetling of to-day will do to place beside Mrs. Moss, to learn his incomparable littleness."

"Well, Rebecca, you are only making it still more difficult for me to retain you in my employ. I cannot reconcile my conscience to seeing you setting tables and dusting furniture, and washing and dressing my children."

"You are very kind, Mrs. Darrell; but let me put it in another light. You have here commenced and are carrying on the enterprise of a home, a very vast undertaking. It includes the gravest responsibilities concerning your husband, yourself, and three living children, to say nothing of other persons employed in the house, or occasional guests. There is nothing small or unimportant about this charge, for every one knows that it is the smallest matters about a home, the ordering and dusting of furniture, the arranging of lights and shades, the opening and shutting of doors, which, so far as comfort and *homeliness* go, make up the most momentous aggregate. You justly feel that this great enterprise, from its largest to its least duty, is the work of your life; the one sole thing for which God made you a woman. But it grows upon you, at last it gets beyond you, you are no longer equal to it. God, in his Providence, has given me no such charge of my own; but he has given me womanly functions all the same; quick perceptions, quiet ways, a love of order and

seemliness, a love of children and a capacity to amuse and instruct them, after a simple fashion of my own, personal and incommunicable. What, then, is my duty? Shall I ignore these, the highest gifts of my nature, in order that I may become a small, feeble parody, a weak burlesque upon man? I think not. Let me rather find work, if not my own individually, at least my own functionally. Let me be a woman still, a helper, if not a designer, of woman's work."

"Rebecca, where did you get all these ideas?"

"I think, madam, they were mostly born in me; came with my womanly temperament."

"You have a womanly temperament, that is true. I think you could never be strong-minded."

Rebecca smiled.

"Perhaps, too, I have told you only part of the truth. Though my ideas, as you call them, are inherent in my temperament, circumstances also have aided in their development. I have been so placed that I have been obliged to think of these things, and, without much use of logic, I have followed my feelings or instincts, and have thus arrived at my present conclusions."

"There is still another objection, which I think of, to your present way of living, which I should never present to a woman of common or coarse instincts; but you have so high and so true an estimate of woman's duties as a wife and mother, that it seems strange to me that you have not considered how much you compromise your own prospects in that direction, by accepting the position of a domestic servant."

Sadness and tears filled Rebecca's eyes. She hesitated before replying.

"If these things entered into my present calculations, which they do not," she said, "I still should scarcely change my position on that account. There are, no doubt,

a great many men, weak, vain, in the masculine sense ambitious, who would shun any woman whom they found engaged in nursery duties. Yet, I cannot help thinking that there are a few men in the world who are capable of discernment in these matters; who see, or could be made to see, that, rightly considered, the care and forming of immortal souls is a higher employment than any mere intellectual labor. It seems to me that one of the crying sins of the women of these times, is the indifference with which they consign their children, during the very age in which they are forming the moral habits of their lives, to the care of ignorant, irreligious nurse-girls, often of foreign extraction, to whom, from the circumstances of their lives, habits of pure thought and strictly virtuous action are impossible."

"Oh, that is so true," interrupted Mrs. Darrell. "It has been my great trouble, that I could not find a nurse-girl who would not teach my children to lie, and make them very careless about taking things not their own."

"Very well, then, it seems to me that a woman with the necessary courage—for it does require, in most women, a good deal of moral courage to face universal custom in such a matter—to undertake these duties in a conscientious spirit, need not fear but there will be a few men who will honor her for it. At any rate, it is only a man capable of such feelings that a woman of self-respect and true womanly feeling would wish to marry."

"That is very true." And Mrs. Darrell paused to ponder over this new view of the matter. For her quick eye had recently noticed a growing leniency in the doctor's manner toward Rebecca, which gave to these remarks a peculiar interest. There was a transparency and want of artifice in Rebecca's character, which the doctor at first had failed to comprehend. Is there a man living, I wonder, who can at first glance distinguish purity,

if it exists without prudery? This woman was as pure in heart and soul and intention as a lily just bathed in dew; and yet there were times when the doctor, looking at her with critical eyes, queried with himself whether a whiteness so white would shrink from the stain of a finger-tip laid upon it. A few trials so delicately put forth, that Rebecca was entirely unaware of their significance, satisfied him; and then, having found purity joined to grace and gentleness and worth, the doctor began to feel attracted toward it. Mrs. Darrell, with a woman's intuitions concerning those she loves, had felt and interpreted the change, even while Rebecca, conscious only of a genial and grateful warmth in the doctor's manner, which cheered without at all alarming her, was utterly ignorant of its true meaning.

One bright spring day, Rebecca had taken the two little girls out into a rough pasture, a half mile from the house, to gather wild flowers. The pasture was skirted on its upper side by the road, which ran around the hill, while below, it grew up into a thicket of white birches, through which a winding path led to a brook, along which grew cowslips and water-cresses. The path was steep and slippery, and the little party, having been down to the brook side, were just emerging from the bushes into the open field, when Mabel tripped, and Rebecca, springing to catch her, stepped upon a stone, and so slipping, caught her foot between two birch saplings which grew from one root, and one of which Mabel had caught, and pulled down by her weight, in her efforts to save herself.

As Mabel regained her footing and released the sapling, it sprang back, causing intense pain to Rebecca. The strength of both children was quite unequal to the task of releasing the foot, and Rebecca, faint and terrified, looked about vaguely for succor.

Just at that moment the old gray horse appeared upon

the road, and the children set up a shrill cry to the doctor for assistance. Now the doctor had not a particle of that external grace which we call gallantry in his composition; but he had a kind heart, and what he called a weakness for women. He no sooner saw, therefore, that Rebecca was in trouble, than he stopped his horse, and, without waiting to fasten it, sprang over the fence with the agility of a boy, and took the shortest path for the bushes. It required but an instant to comprehend the situation. The doctor's old jack-knife was evidently not equal to it, but he quickly produced a pocket case of surgical instruments, from which he drew a weapon of more formidable powers, one stroke from which so weakened the sapling that it was the work of an instant to release the foot.

Rebecca sank upon the ground, unable, for a moment, to stand.

"It was lucky," said the doctor, "that I had that case with me. I don't often carry it; but I had a surgical operation to perform to-day, and knew I should need it. Evelyn, take this cup, and go down to the brook, and bring some water. I always carry a rubber cup in my pocket, because I ride far sometimes, and I like to stop at a spring. You'll get over this faintness in a minute, and then I'll take you home in the chaise."

While the girls were gone, Rebecca's eye fell on the pocket case, which lay by her side. There was nothing singular about it, except that upon the inside of the flap, by which it was fastened, was a small miniature, done in oil; it was certainly an odd place for a miniature to be; but there it was, and Rebecca, looking steadily at it, felt the blood rushing back upon her heart and her eyes growing dim. In an instant she had fainted.

"Ho, ho!" said the doctor, "what now! what now!"

The girls had not yet returned from the brook, but, relieved from fear by the doctor's presence with Rebecca,

were coming up through the bushes, with much tumultuous shouting and laughter. The doctor heard it, and disapproved. He had a horror of romps.

"*Boys!*" he cried, in his solemnest tones, "come here. Rebecca has fainted."

That intelligence, together with the implied reproof, sobered them at once, and they hastened to the spot. The doctor was cool and practiced, and he soon had Rebecca restored to her senses. Her first glance was towards the pocket-case. The doctor followed her eye.

"Oh, ho," he said, "afraid of cold steel. Steel is very harmless—very harmless, indeed, if you keep out of the way of it."

There was something in Rebecca's eye which the theory of cold steel did not solve; and the doctor, looking at her again, knew it. Her glance was still fixed upon the miniature. To her returning vision, it wore a different look from the one which had so affected her.

"I fancied," she said, "a moment ago, that I knew that face. I believe I was mistaken."

"Yes," said the doctor, pensively, "I guess you was. I don't see how you could know it. How do you feel now?"

"Very much better. I think I can walk to the chaise."

She was still very pale, and though the doctor certainly was not so lover-like in his attentions as a youth in his twenties might have been, he was, nevertheless, very considerate.

"You can't walk over this rough ground, alone," he said; "you'd better take my arm. We'll go slow. Children, you go on ahead, and hold the horse. I guess she won't run away. She's pretty well used to standing, but you may as well hold her. Now, Rebecca, lean on me as heavily as you choose; I can bear your weight."

Rebecca did lean on him. She was weaker than he had

supposed, and he put his arm about her waist, for her further support. Now, there was about the doctor a certain capacity to adapt himself to feminine weakness and dependence, which was, perhaps, the secret of half his success in his profession. He knew how to take hold of a woman so as to inspire the fullest trust, and at the same time afford the most perfect relief. It is the true secret of masculine protection, and to know it gives a man great command over female sensibilities. Rebecca had other causes for gratitude to the doctor, but nothing had taken so dangerous a hold on her emotions, as this firm support, so freely and tenderly, yet so fearlessly given. In that moment of weakness and self-distrust, there flowed into her heart a sweet sense of what it would be to her, always to be so supported, in times of emergency. She banished the feeling, instantly, as if it had been sinful, and with the very effort strove to regain her independence of motion. But that was useless. They had reached the wall, and the doctor said, gravely:

“Now, give yourself up to me. I’ll put you over safely, and then I’ll lift you into the chaise. You will see how easy it is.”

When they were seated in the chaise, the doctor said:

“You asked me about that picture. Five or six years ago, I brought a man out of what he considered a very dangerous situation. I suppose it was dangerous—I suppose, with some kinds of treatment, he might very easily have died. In fact, I reported the case to the medical journals, and I think the profession took that view of it. He gave me that case of instruments. It is a better one than I had ever owned then. I’ve got another now as good, but that was the best I had ever seen when he gave it to me. He had a friend who was an artist—had been with him during that sickness, and who painted the portraits of all the family about that time. He took a

fancy to put that miniature in the inside of the case. I don't think any more of it for the picture. I don't often carry it, but I happened to have it with me to-day. The man was Richard Gladstone, half-brother to Abraham Gladstone, in the village."

Rebecca drew a long breath when she heard that name, and the doctor, who had been watching her keenly, saw that she felt relieved.

"I suppose I was just on the point of fainting when I saw the picture," she said, "and my imagination distorted it. I certainly never heard of the man you mention before."

The doctor had reasons of his own for saying nothing more upon the subject. But it occurred to him that, though Gladstone was in South America, Marston, the painter, was in New York; and if this woman ever *had* known the former, a few well put questions might elicit the fact, and do no harm to anybody.

"A man wants to know something more about a woman," soliloquized the doctor, "than just what she is herself, if he thinks of marrying her. He wants to know something about her family and antecedents. Rebecca March is a good woman. What her family and antecedents may be, I can't say."

From which it may be inferred that the doctor had ideas of marriage.

IX.

HYSTERICIS.

If the life of Mrs. Darrell at this point were the least exceptional, it would scarcely be worth narrating here; but it is essentially the life of thousands of females in this country of irrepressible activity and fierce competition; and where the subject is a woman of energy and thoughtfulness, the results are, in the majority of cases, similar, in a greater or less degree, to those hereinafter depicted. Therefore, if the gentlemen of this enlightened land feel any uneasiness concerning the increasing tendency to "strong-mindedness" manifested by their wives and daughters, let them consider the source to which this tendency is to be rightfully attributed, before condemning it with too great vehemence. Happy are they if these are the worst results of their neglect; for, however it is to be lamented, it is nevertheless true, that the unwritten records of fallen women offer many most pregnant hints in the same direction.

Ralph Darrell's grief for the loss of his son was doubtless keen. For a few weeks, the house seemed still to him; he missed the baby's cooing voice, the baby's pattering feet; but one unfailing resource abundantly sufficed for the occasion. The early bitterness of sorrow he felt, but that later stage, wherein alone the sweet, spiritual ministry of grief is experienced, he staved off by means of a fierce, absorbing struggle with business. If the freshness of the morning brought up the tender haunting memory, he laid the beautiful ghost at once, by the reflection that it was steamer day, and a telegram of European news might be awaiting him at the office. If

at evening the rosy hush of twilight and the whisper of sweet winds among the leaves set the secret fountains of his heart astir, he grew uneasy, informed his wife that he had letters to write, and betook himself again to that dim and dusty solitude, whose air was fatal to all sentiment and emotion. In two months' time, his boy's life was something almost as remote and unreal to his present existence as if he had lived in the time of the Pharaohs.

"Laura," he said, one morning, a frown bending his eyebrows, "how did that spot in the carpet come to be so much more worn than the rest?"

A pang that was like an arrow shot through Laura's heart, but it was worse than useless to manifest her emotion to him.

"That is where I sat all last winter to rock baby Ralph to sleep."

To her, tender memories made the spot as sacred as her baby's grave; to him, it was a mere blotch that damaged the carpet by so many dollars and cents. The house was full, to her eyes, of little touching mementos of her baby's life, which kept the thought of him constantly near her heart; marks and tokens, and visible sign manuals, from which her loving eyes and cherishing memory could frame a whole history of her darling's joys and sorrows, his gambols and his illnesses, which to her husband were mere lifeless, soulless scratches.

It was this loneliness in her sorrow which seemed to be breaking her heart. As the long, bright, spring days came on with their lassitude and oppression, she had no strength to meet them. Force and energy seemed slowly slipping away from her. She had no pain, no symptoms of illness, which any physician could lay hold of; but her cheek grew pale, her eye lost its light, her lip its smiling curve, and weariness and lassitude possessed her whole frame.

"Doctor," said Mr. Darrell to his brother-in-law, "I wish you'd do something for Laura. She seems to need tonics. Can't you fix her up some bitters, or something?"

"H'm! h'm!" said the doctor, pensively. "She don't need bitters so much as *sweets*."

Mr. Darrell was puzzled. He never did understand the doctor.

"Well, sweets then. I don't care what it is, so you get some life in her eye, some strength into her frame."

"Darrell, medicine won't do anything for your wife. She needs a husband."

Mr. Darrell's face flushed, and he looked angry.

"Bulwer says," continued the doctor, deliberately, "'the match for beauty is a man, not a *money-chest*.' I may not have got the words, but that's the meaning. I'd advise you to give less attention to your business for a little while, say a few months this summer, and doctor your wife yourself. It won't break you."

"Why, that's preposterous. Nothing ails her, only she's run down a little. She can go to Saratoga, if she likes. Very likely the waters would do her good. I'll propose it to her."

Mr. Darrell walked away with a vague idea, caught from the doctor's significant "humph," that the waters would not do her any good, and he muttered to himself:

"These confounded women doctors. I believe they'd make a fool of a female angel. They know which side their bread is buttered on."

There came a bright June Sabbath evening. The day had been one of those perfect, gem-like days, which only June and October, of all the year, afford. Not a cloud, not a flaw of wind, not a breath of cold or dampness, to break the perfect untroubled serenity and repose. Even Mr. Darrell's tightly-strung fibers were relaxed a little; the soft June sunshine, the angel-like ministry of the whispering breeze,

the smile of nature's most persuasive eloquence, thrilled his heart, and he really had a glimmering of a delight which could not be paid for in coin of the realm. To Laura, the softening influences of the day had been partly counteracted by the tone and vigor of the morning sermon; a sermon from Job, touching with deepest, tenderest pathos, the springs of human trouble; yet catching, at last, the resonant blare of the golden horn, with which the ancient singer rouses the soul to its serenest trust and confidence in the Most High. At the close of this sweet, prophetic day, which had brought Heaven so near, both to her material and spiritual vision, she felt that she could bow with patience and hope to the decree of her Heavenly Father; she could even, with a little help—just one steady, strong uplifting from her husband's arm, regain her equipoise, accept the burden of her sorrow, and bear it with womanly fortitude and heroism. As they walked through the shrubbery together, in the twilight, she said to him:

“Ralph, how much money are you worth?”

“Oh! I don't know. Not half so much as I ought to be at my time of life.”

“But your business is so well under way now, can't you relax a little in your personal endeavors, and so have more time for me?”

“You don't know anything about it, Laura. If a man don't attend to his business, his business will soon attend to him. Six months of careless handling is enough to ruin any enterprise.”

“But you say you do not care for money, and you know I do not. If this trade of money-getting proves so hard a master, why not give it up altogether? We will go into a small house, and keep only one servant, or not any, if you like, and then I am sure we might live on what you have already made.”

He smiled, a smile intended to be sarcastic.

"Love in a cottage! I thought we exploded that humbug long ago."

"Ralph, are you any happier now than you were the first year of our marriage, when you kept store and I kept house, with very little help from anybody about either?"

"Oh, that time is all well enough, to look back upon. If I hadn't any more to think of now, than I had then, I should go crazy. Laura, business is the life of my life."

"Dear, you used to say that of *me*."

"Oh, that was in our courting days. A man can't always be courting."

"Why not?" asked Laura, as a desperate push, to get at the real state of her husband's mind.

"Why not!" he repeated, impatiently. "I don't know, unless because a man outgrows it. It takes a young man, Laura, for that sort of thing; a man who has the freshness of his youth in him. You rub off that in business."

"I have seen some widowers who managed it very well," said Laura, demurely.

He made a grimace.

"Oh! to win a woman, a man's got to make a fool of himself, I suppose. It will do for an occasion; but, if a man has his bread and butter to earn, the sooner he gets back into his right senses, the better for him."

"Ralph, it is not your bread and butter that you are spending all your energies to earn; but houses, and lands, and mills, and superfluous thousands, to impoverish, more probably than to make rich, your own and your children's lives; to make hard, and narrow, and selfish, and shallow, what ought to be broad, and deep, and noble, and true. When we were first married, you used to enjoy reading as much as I. We spent no happier hours together, than those at evening, when I sewed, and you read aloud from poem, or story, or magazine. I shall always love 'Evangeline' better than all other poems, because I never read

it but it brings back to me those charming hours when we sat side by side, reading it out of one book, your eye kindling as my heart throbbed to each tender and ennobling sentiment. The other day I read 'Maud,' and cried over almost every page of it, because I knew you would never share the pleasure with me, and so give it two-fold sweetness."

"Well, dear, you see I lose as much as you. I know I am giving up a great deal, but, then, it is for your sake, as much as anybody's. By and by, I shall have done with business, and then we shall renew the old times."

"Ralph," said Laura, earnestly, repeating his own words, "It takes a man with his youth in him for these things. You are killing out all your youthfulness of heart and soul. By the time you are fifty, your better nature will be so shriveled and starved, that I question if it can ever be resuscitated. It is that, more even than my own desolation, that I protest against."

The twilight deepened, and they entered the house. Ralph stooped, in the dusk of the hall, and pressed a kiss to her lips. He was touched with remorse, but not with repentance.

A week later, he went down to New York on business. When he returned, Laura found on her dressing-table a case, containing a handsome set of diamonds, with this little note:

"MY DEAREST WIFE: This is dear little Ralph's birthday. I thought you would like to know that I did not forget it, even in New York. Remember, that to men is given a different calling from that of women, and never cease to love and pray for
YOUR HUSBAND."

Laura opened the case, looked at it coldly, and with a sigh, and pushed it aside. She took up the note quite mechanically, for she had ceased to expect what her heart

still longed for; but, as she read those few simple words, tears suffused her eyes, and she pressed it again and again to her lips, in a passion of weeping. The old fountains of tenderness were thrilled anew; and all that day there went singing through her soul the same sweet flow of rapture that made her wedding day the happiest of her life.

Mr. Darrell saw it, and felt relieved. He had done his duty now. The doctor had said she wanted sweets. A thousand dollar set of diamonds, and five lines of sweet remembrance, ought to last her—well, a year or so. With less compunction than ever, therefore, he went on with his buying, and selling, and getting gain; and Laura, let down from her temporary exaltation, sank deeper than ever into that terrible slough, so well known, and so dreaded by physicians, and pining, starving women; that limbo made up of despondency, hysteria, nervousness, weary days, and sleepless nights, and visions and phantoms of horror, that should beset only the maniac and the opium eater. In such cases the victim is usually well pelted with epithets, “spleeny,” “lazy,” “hypo-y.” Old wives exclaim, “Let her work as we worked; she’ll get rid of her nerves then.” The more charitable prescribe change of air and scene—something to make her forget her whim. Only the patient physician stands by her, the man of knowledge, and insight, and sympathy; and seeing the suffering, and feeling its reality, says, with tender, cheerful faith:

“Let us have patience and good courage. Nature will exhaust herself, by and by, with these protests. You will be broken, then, and weak in physical strength, the freshness and the beauty of your youth clean gone; but you will be, mayhap, stronger in spirit, serener in faith, and you will take up the burden of life again, with a deeper insight, bought by experience, a nobler courage, anchored to a diviner trust. You will have gained heights of spiritual experience, where *no man can follow you.*”

So nature ordains her priestesses; so Laura Darrell reaped, in time, from this sowing, harvests of incalculable value.

But the ripening of such seed does not come till after months, and perhaps years, of torture. The exhausting heats of summer came on, and Laura grew thinner, paler, more spiritless, till at last her husband could no longer ignore her suffering. He had appealed to the doctor vainly. A brilliant thought occurred to him. If medicine could not reach her case, the evil must be spiritual. He would bring in the minister.

The church in Wyndham happened to be, at that time, without a supply. But in an adjoining county lived a cousin of Mr. Darrell, a man of eminence in his profession, of sound theological views, and every way a man to be trusted. To Mr. Linscott he would apply. He sat down, therefore, and wrote him a letter, stating that, since the death of their little boy, his wife had seemed to be suffering in health; the doctor had been consulted, but could do nothing. It was evidently a case of spiritual malady. Would Mr. Linscott pay them a visit, merely in a casual way, saying nothing about this letter or its contents, and see if he could not so argue the matter as to bring Mrs. Darrell into a calmer and more resigned frame of mind?

Mr. Linscott had not a doubt of his ability to do so; and well pleased to be able to render a service to his cousin Darrell, he harnessed his shiny black horse into his shiny black chaise, and rode over to Wyndham. He was a handsome man, erect, imposing, with clear complexion, ruddy cheeks, and coal black eyes and hair. He was not an unkindly man; but his chief characteristic was his firmness. He had his own ideas, good ideas in the main, though possibly narrow, and he stood by them.

It was after dinner, when Mr. Darrell had returned to the office, that he found his first opportunity of opening

his mission to Mrs. Darrell. They were sitting in the library, Laura looking the exact counterpart of her picture over the mantel, in the white robe, pinned with the clustered garnets, except that she was so pale, so thin, so chastened in expression.

"Cousin Laura," said Mr. Linscott, "it seems to me you are not looking quite as well as usual, this summer. You have less color, less spirit. I hope your health is not suffering?"

"The summer heat seems to have affected me rather more than usual," she said, instinctively recognizing the man's purpose, and as instinctively shrinking from it.

"Can't the doctor afford you any relief?"

"Medicine, so far, does not seem to have benefited me very much."

"I hope your spiritual state is quite satisfactory. Do you find your usual enjoyment in religious exercises?"

Laura hesitated. This was not the kind of man to whom she could reveal the inner sanctuary of her heart; yet all the more, because she knew that she was at present more than usually sensitive upon the subject, she felt that perhaps she ought to conquer her sensitiveness. She replied, not, it must be confessed, in any very confidential way:

"At times, I have."

"And not always? I hope there is no shadow of coldness or distrust between you and your Heavenly Father?"

"I believe Job did not always enjoy unclouded sunshine. I confess that I have sympathized with that worthy more than usually, of late."

"Your affliction has no doubt been very great, but there is strength in heaven for all times of trial, if we but make the proper application for it. Christ is able and willing to uphold and support us, if we call on him."

Laura was silent for a moment. "It seems to me," she

said, at length, "that we get that strength very much in the same way that the prophets and apostles of old received their inspiration; that is, through a certain harmony of the physical and spiritual forces. When that harmony is disturbed, we are left in darkness; when it prevails, we have the open vision."

"The Bible makes no such limitations of God's power. It tells us all things are possible with Him."

"Yet experience proves that He works by law; and that seems to me to be the law in this case. I know that my Heavenly Father still lives and still loves me. I trust Him still, and at times I gain sweet assurance of His presence and blessing; but, on the whole, I am in a low, doubtful, desponding frame of mind, which, it seems to me, is more caused by material than spiritual conditions."

"Let us investigate that matter a little. When you lost your little boy, what was the state of your mind concerning that dispensation of God's providence?"

"I felt, at first, as I suppose most mothers do, under similar circumstances: so heart-broken, so crazed with grief, that I hardly knew where to look for help; hardly believed that the universe could hold relief for pain so poignant. Afterwards, as I got calmer, I felt that mine was not an isolated case, and that I must submit humbly and resignedly to the will of my Father in heaven. It was very hard to do, but God is higher than I, in love, as in wisdom. I know and feel it."

"I must think, cousin Laura, that there is still some withholding on your part, or the blessing would come. God's promises are never made in vain."

"Mr. Linscott, that blessing has come, in such measure as I cannot express. In that respect my doubt, and my weakness, and my darkness, have not been in vain; for upon them my Father has drawn, as in strong relief, the lines of His wise and tender purposes. I cannot tell you,

I cannot tell any person, the visions of heavenly wisdom I have had at times. I know, as I never did before, that my Father lives; that He loves me, and that, in His own good time and way, He will bring me out of my present darkness; and that, for this season of sorrow, He will give me, nay, is giving me, compensations of priceless value. My soul is stronger to-day, to love, to sorrow, to pity, to sympathize, than it ever was before. I see more clearly the reasons of God's dealing with me. I can look farther into heavenly mysteries; I can fathom more deeply heavenly purposes. Yet, while spiritually I have this solemn and serene trust, physically I pine, I languish, I daily die. Therefore I am not happy; therefore I cry out, with Job, 'Why is light given to a man, from whom the way is hid?'"

"Mr. Linscott was silent. "God is dealing with you, sister, after a fashion of His own," he said, at length; "and when God speaks, it becomes us to lay our hands upon our mouths, and our mouths in the dust."

He was obliged to report to Mr. Darrell that cousin Laura's spiritual state seemed hopeful. God was dealing mysteriously with her, but there was good evidence that He had not forsaken her. "We must trust to time," he said. "I have often found before now, that the ways of God with women were seemingly deeper than with men—probably because of their weaker natures."

Ralph Darrell knew enough of his wife to feel certain that her nature, whatever else it might be, was no weaker than his, than Mr. Linscott's, than that of any average man he knew. Therefore, he said to himself:

"It's just because they are so queer and willful. Laura, at least, ought to have more good sense; to behave like a reasonable woman."

According to the universal showing of men, women are not reasonable beings, but creatures of feeling, emotion, intuition. This when they ask equality with man; but

let them once be pushed to the wall in any of the thousand struggles which women have constantly to meet as women, and if they show any signs of emotional weakness, it is suddenly remembered against them that they are, or ought to be, reasonable creatures. But Ralph Darrell was not so cruel as some men. He worked himself into a generous mood toward his wife, and magnanimously *forgave her*.

E

X.

AN OLD MAN'S DREAM.

Three months in the quiet air of Wyndham had done much for Rebecca. There is scarcely any trouble so deep, any state of the mental and spiritual forces so disorganized, that steady, genial employment, correct habits of living, and the quiet, loving influences of nature, will not do much to ameliorate it. If there be added to these a reverent and childlike trust in God our Father, and a constant recognition of His love, as manifested in His Providence, trouble becomes, if not powerless, then the minister of high and holy things, for which no price that human beings can pay is too exorbitant.

Gradually, under these combined influences, light was coming back to Rebecca's eye, color to her cheek, elasticity to her step, and though she still passed weary hours of retrospection, still, as she went about her daily tasks, stifled many secret heart-throes, her life, on the whole, caught many hues of brightness, and the blessings she was constantly bestowing upon others returned in even measure to herself.

Mrs. Darrell's cook was a middle aged woman, who had been for years in the service of the Gladstone family. When the great house was shut up, Nancy felt almost as much disinherited as Abraham himself. But Mrs. Darrell, too well pleased to obtain the services of a faithful and capable housekeeper, not to be willing to make a proper return for them, had offered Nancy a home in her house, and here she had ever since remained.

Nancy was one of that almost extinct race, a well-trained American domestic. She had been the daughter

of a small farmer, whose children, happening to be mostly girls instead of boys, had been obliged to earn their own living. In the days when factories had not yet become synonyms of Paradise, domestic service was the principal refuge of girls so situated, and it was then possible to find the reliable character and steady good sense for which New Englanders are noted, in the young woman who offered herself as domestic help. Commencing thus, and failing, for some reason best known to herself, of marriage, Nancy was still pursuing her avocation, and had won for herself the respect of her superiors, and a certain position, half-way between that of an ordinary servant and the wife of a mechanic or small tradesman. With such a person, it was not difficult for Rebecca to associate and still maintain her self-respect. Indeed, Nancy was too thoroughly respectful in her nature not at once to accord to the nursery maid the superior honor which she felt to be her due. Therefore, Rebecca's position in the family, though it entailed its constant and somewhat wearing duties, and was, after all, essentially the place of a servant, had still such advantages of comfort and independence as she could scarcely have found elsewhere.

Mr. and Mrs. Darrell were no more generous than thousands of employers would be if they could gain such trusty, intelligent service as Rebecca rendered, yet they did thoroughly appreciate the blessing they enjoyed, and daily acknowledged it.

"Laura," said Mr. Darrell, as he came into the breakfast room one morning, and noticed how fresh and neat everything looked; how the window curtains were adjusted to give just the most agreeable light, and the silver on the sideboard was arranged in just the most tasteful way, and a glass of fresh flowers on the side-table brightened and cheered the room as only flowers can;

"Laura, what a treasure that new girl of your's is. Why, she really carries us back to the days when you did your own housekeeping, and made the presence of a refined woman felt everywhere. Now that you've got a good girl, do keep her. Wages are no sort of object."

"Rebecca *is* a refined woman," said Mrs. Darrell. "That she ever came to seek service is a great wonder in this country. She values self-respect and a few privileges more than wages."

"Very well, then, it is better to put one's self out a little to please her, than let her go. Make her position pleasant, as well as her wages satisfactory, for we really can't afford to lose her."

It fell out, therefore, that the work was so arranged that Rebecca found some spare time in every week for reading, or sewing, or walking, or even visiting. Of the last she had little to do, beyond an occasional hour with Mrs. Moss, or, rarely, a shorter visit to Miss Joanna's nursery. For Miss Joanna, finding how apt Rebecca was with children, had invited, and even urged her to drop in now and then upon her little charge, and Rebecca, at first, with a painful distrust of herself, but with increasing confidence as the weeks passed, occasionally accepted the invitation.

The baby's clothes, when she had come to Wyndham, had all been marked with a C. Wherefore, the doctor, who had been requested by his sister to name the child, called her Catherine. Miss Joanna was greatly pleased, but very soon shortened the stately baptismal to Kitty. Not so the doctor, who had no liking for the fashion of abbreviations, and invariably spoke of the child by her full name.

But Kitty was, nevertheless, a great pet with him, as with the rest of the family, and was as tenderly watched over as a child could be.

One bright June afternoon, Rebecca set out to do some errands at the village store, and call on Mrs. Moss. Going past the plain, old-fashioned house, where the doctor and his sister resided, she espied Miss Joanna and little Kitty on the lawn, the latter lying in her buggy, while Miss Joanna sat beside her knitting an afghan. Joanna Gaines was a woman deserving of description.

She was taller than her sister, thinner and more angular. Her features were strongly cast, and, at first view, she was always pronounced incomparably less beautiful than Laura. But her complexion, though pale, was very fine, and the faint color that sometimes stained her cheek, was of that exquisite rose, seen only with the finest organizations, and with them but on rare occasions. Her eyes, too, had a soft, peculiar light, not brilliant, or in the least alluring, unless one observed closely its coy coming and going, and then it was most captivating. A certain dainty tenderness of manner, tempered by a shy reserve, was, to those who knew her best, an indescribable charm; while the coarser multitude held what of her they could not understand in reverent admiration. With so much refined feeling, she joined the staunch good sense of her family; so that, though circumstances had confirmed her natural leaning to habits of seclusion, she had never grown morbid or melancholy; and now that a new and most deep and pure interest was given her in life, she seemed always to have been the most gracefully genial and delicately fascinating person you had ever known.

Some strong instinct arrested Rebecca's feet, as she looked up at the pretty picture of the baby-carriage standing in the shadow of a great elm, dappled all over with flickering gloom and brightness, and the gentle woman sitting beside it, pausing now and then at her work, to coo a greeting to the rosy child.

She stood for a moment with her hand upon her heart,

the shadow of a great longing settling upon her features. Presently Miss Joanna saw her, and called:

"Come in, Reba, and see how pretty Kitty looks, in her short dresses."

Rebecca cleared her face of that sad look, and pressing back the tears that were so ready to flow, walked up the graveled path, and stooping, kissed the pretty baby. Five minutes of nursery chat followed, and then the doctor appeared at the doorway of the house.

"Good afternoon, Rebecca," he said, in his grave way, ignoring now, as always, the abbreviation of her name, which Maude Darrell had made a law to every one but her uncle.

Rebecca returned the salutation, and added a remark about the baby.

"Yes, Catherine thrives very well. Better, I think, than she would have done in the city alms-house. Joanna—looks—motherly. I think she is *getting* to look *very* motherly."

Rebecca smiled, and the faint color trickled up into Joanna's white cheek.

"I think," said the doctor, who loved to have the conversation mostly to himself; "I think a woman should always look motherly if she can. I don't know what better a woman can be than a mother, and if she hasn't any children of her own, why, let her be a mother to somebody's else children. Joanna is trying it. I think—she—likes—it."

"Yes," said Joanna, demurely, "I used to have thoughts of writing poetry, or going on a mission, or something of that sort. I've given all that up now."

"Humph!" said the doctor; "all things have their uses. Literary women have their uses. They make work for the doctors, for one thing. They tear their nervous systems—all—to—pieces. Never knew one that was

healthy, in my life. They make their husbands—if they have any—miserable; and it's ten to one if they earn—enough—to—pay—their—washerwoman. They'd better be tending babies."

"You are not thinking of Mrs. Stowe and Mrs. Browning now," said Joanna, quietly

"If women will write *good* books," said the doctor, "I've no objections. A good workman is never to be despised. A poet is as likely to be a woman as a man, for all I know. If the poet soul gets into the woman's brain, why, it's like a flower, it must blossom. Who shall hinder? But, after all, it seems to me that women don't see clearly, when they rank the poet before the mother, in use or in honor. It is with that as with everything else. They are so many dabsters at the trade."

"Mrs. Stowe and Mrs. Browning are both mothers," said Rebecca, "and the latter, at least, has written: 'No perfect artist ever was developed from an imperfect woman.' And the writings of the other are full of inspirations which could never have come to any other soul than a mother's."

"And they have been, so far as we know, happy wives and happy mothers," said Joanna. "The proverbial misery of literary marriages does not seem to attend them."

"I think," said Rebecca, "the great trouble with literary women, in regard to marriage, has been, that they have not been careful to observe the order of nature, in regard to their gifts, but have ranked those of the intellect over purely feminine endowments. Nature will not be ignored. Women must be content to be women first—after that, scribes."

While she was speaking, the doctor was looking at her from under his bushy eyebrows, with a steady, searching glance. As she concluded, he drew on his driving gloves, as if about ready to take leave of the group."

"Rebecca," he said, eyeing her walking-shoes, "were you going down town?"

"Yes, sir," she answered, "to the store, and to Mrs. Moss'."

The doctor whistled, and looked off at the sky, as if prospecting the weather, while the two women concluded their chat. Then he asked, with a certain shy gravity, which yet overlaid a tender meaning:

"I am going that way. Will you ride with me?"

"With pleasure," she replied; "I shall enjoy a drive exceedingly."

As they walked, side by side, down the graveled path, that same shy courtesy in the doctor, that nameless something which reminded her of Joanna's tender fascinations, flashed a vision across Rebecca's mind, of what it might be to her to live in this house; to be a sharer in its joys and its anxieties; to lean with true respect and fervent gratitude upon this strong, well-tried arm. It would not be the paradise of a love-lorn maiden's dream; but might it not be something yet deeper, more restful, more satisfying. The vision lasted but a moment; it faded before it was scarcely formed. But she sighed, as women will sigh whose feet are called to tread in lonely paths.

Moses Moss' cottage stood just beyond the town, and the doctor chose a by-road to it, that day; a little round-about, but lying through the woods, whose dim and solemn depths were overflowed, just now, by pink seas of blossoming laurel.

"I always like to ride through the woods when the laurels are in blossom," said the doctor. "I don't mind flowers much, generally. I'm not at all sentimental, but there is something in the freshness and abundance of the laurels which reminds me of my youth. Youth is a man's spring-time; and, if there is anything of the man about him, he is apt, then, to be about as full of promise and anticipation

as these laurels are. The laurel blossoms fade away, like the promise of most men's lives, into something very tame and commonplace. All the same, I like to see them in their prime."

"Yes," said Rebecca, "and the promise of your life, I am sure, has been well redeemed."

"In a measure, perhaps. But the heart knoweth its own bitterness. I had a good many dreams in my youth, which have never been fulfilled. I don't complain. I don't complain. Maybe some other lives have been the richer for the poverty of mine. If they have, it is all right, and I don't complain. But a man of my years, with so many old friends dropping off and no new ties forming, has his times of feeling the need of companionship." There was a little pause, during which the doctor whistled pensively. "I suppose, Rebecca," he said, "I seem very old to you?"

He looked around at her shyly, with an interest in her answer which he did not attempt to conceal.

"Some lives," she said, "are so full of the best forces, energy, skill, and a broad, open charity, that, instead of growing old, they seem only to ripen with years. So, though I know that you are past the meridian of your life, it never seems to me that you are old, but only mature."

The answer pleased the doctor; and yet it came so frankly, with no timid, girlish blush, no flutter of pleased embarrassment at being asked, that he dared not presume upon it. More and more this woman puzzled and interested him. There was a purity about her like that which we associate with children; yet, by that subtle test of magnetism which we all possess in a greater or less degree, he knew that her experiences had been those of a mature woman. At the same time, she was not old—twenty-five at the farthest, the doctor thought. She was naturally of a fond, loving, trusting nature, yet her discretion, her capacity to carry herself with perfect poise

and self-possession through the most embarrassing circumstances, were wonderful for anything but a thoroughly tried and mature woman.

There was some further chat between them, mostly of a quiet, intimate nature, which made Rebecca feel that she had been taken nearer to the doctor's affectional life than strangers were usually permitted to go, and that there was an unsuspected fountain of warmth and fullness somewhere in his nature, and then they reached Mrs. Moss' door, and parted.

The doctor drove away in a happy vein, which made the sunshine seem more golden, and tinted the landscape to his eyes with softer hues.

There is scarcely anything, I think, more touching than an old man's dream of love. It lacks entirely the brilliant hues and strong groupings of thirty years before; but, like the landscape of the Indian summer, it has a pure and peaceful charm that is all its own. As the old chaise rattled over the flinty roads that afternoon, the doctor saw no waving fields of corn on either side of him—heard no piping thrush in the alder thickets by the way. He was living in a different world. A young man dreams of being beloved; an old man dreams of loving. And so the doctor dreamed of making more bright and beautiful his ancient home, that a young life might find more fitting welcome there; of a thousand tender little devices for banishing the grief and sadness from that gentle heart, and basked with very Epicurean delight in the thought of winning an untroubled glow of sunshine to settle in those deep, brown eyes, and ray out each day its joy and gratitude for him.

Just then the old gray stumbled, and recalled by this incident to the outer world, he noticed that he was passing the deserted Gladstone mansion. The fact changed the current of the doctor's meditations. "H'm! h'm!" he

said; "I must see Marston when I go to New York. If that man ever knew Rebecca, it is ten to one I can find out by him. I must attend to that matter. The girl herself is all right—nothing bad about her; but there is something wrong about her circumstances. I must find out what it is. At my time of life it won't do to make a fool of myself. I can't go to New York just yet; but I must attend to it when I do go."

Again and again the doctor had thought this affair over. At first, as a mere matter of speculation; afterwards, with a nearer interest. If there was one thing which the doctor was more sensitive about than all others, it was his good name. The family record was an untarnished one. For fifty years he himself had kept it without stain; he had even, he hoped, added something to its original luster. At his age he might safely predict that it would never be disgraced by his sins; but many a man has overturned the goodly structure of a lifetime by a single act of weakness or folly committed when his hair had grown white.

Dr. Gaines had wonderful good sense. He meant to be very careful that no momentary weakness should betray him into an act which he might repent vainly through long, repining years.

XI.

THE MAKING OF MEN.

The advent of Rebecca in Mrs. Moss' kitchen was always a hilarious event. Seen from afar, her approach gave rise to an indiscriminate process of brushing, and dusting, and putting to rights. Once seated and divested of her outer garments, a vigorous and combined assault of all the small fry was made, until she was forced to tell them a story, or dress a rag baby, or, at the very least, to tie paper shoes on "Diany," and set that feline worthy dancing for their amusement. This last was a feat that no one could accomplish but Rebecca; for no one else had that rare talent which is a combination of force and flattery, and which alone is equal to the disposition of cats. Some one or all of these propitiations being rendered, the children were usually dispersed into the yard with a piece of gingerbread by way of bribe, and then ensued a long confidential talk between Rebecca and Mrs. Moss.

On this particular day, Rebecca had come provided with sundry small bits of bright colored cloth and tiny tinsel buttons, by means of which she intended to put Pamela into gorgeous array. Behold her, therefore, seated in the low, straight-backed, chintz covered rocking chair, Diana curled comfortably in her lap and purring in long meter, and the scissors and needle in her hand, while she fashioned a dainty waist of red merino, for the rag effigy known as Pamela.

"Miss Rebecca," asked Belinda, the five year old, confidentially, "don't you think Diana is a beautiful cat?"

"Very," said Rebecca, assuringly, "and she purrs the loudest of any cat I ever saw."

"I don't care," said Jane, incipient bellehood rearing its ambitious crest in her soul, "Fanny Ellery has got a splendid tabby, and you know yourself, Miss Rebecca, Maude Darrell has got a new Maltese, with double paws. Diana is real old fashioned, and I think we ought to have a new cat."

Then followed a long confidential talk with Rebecca concerning the possibilities of inducing Maude to part with one of the Maltese cat's (supposititious) kittens, which ended in Rebecca promising, in case the supposed contingency arose, to use her best endeavors to procure one. For which reason Jane felt better able to hold up her head for several days thereafter.

In the midst of this discussion, Theodore burst into the room, from the potato field, where he had been hoeing.

His greeting was a noisy but hearty one. The next moment he caught sight of Rebecca's work.

"I say, old maid, what are you making there?" he exclaimed. "Jackets for the little tanagers down in the alders, I swear; I'll go fetch in the young devils, to try on their toggery;" and with that he was off like a shot to the brook, and in spite of exclamations and protestations he laid the pretty round nest, with its still unfeathered innocents, into Rebecca's lap.

Mrs. Moss was greatly distressed.

"Theodore!" she exclaimed, "how can you? What does make you such a cruel, hard-hearted boy?"

"Cruel! that's a good joke. Why, I brought them in for Diany's supper. Here, old lady, they're young and tender. Let's hear you crack their bones." And he held the piping younglings over Diana's nose; and only that Rebecca asserted her womanly dignity, and gently ordered boy and cat and birds out of the house, the sacrifice would have been completed before their eyes.

Poor Mrs. Moss sighed deeply, and turned the whole

brood out of doors, with a command for them not to set their feet into the house for the next hour.

"Miss Rebecca," she said, when quiet reigned, "I do wish I knew what to do with that boy. He is the greatest trial of my life. 'Taint two weeks ago that his father gave him a terrible thrashing, and sent him to bed without his supper. The next mornin' he wasn't to be found, and he staid away two nights. I declare, I thought I should go crazy; but he came back at last, and what do you suppose he said? He came in just at the gray of dusk, when he knew his father'd be out of the house, and the children, too; and he came along kind o' quiet by my side, and he says, 'good evenin', mother.'

"'Why, Theodore,' says I, half scar't to death, 'where have you been?'

"'Where I never'd a' come back from, mother,' says he, 'if 't hadn't been for you. Did you lie awake last night and night before thinking about me?'

"Says I, 'Theodore, I never slept a blessed wink neither night.'

Says he, 'I knew it, mother, and I couldn't sleep, a-thinkin' of it. But father, he didn't lie awake none. Oh, you needn't tell me, I know.'

"'Yes he did,' says I; 'Theodore, yes he did. Your father was troubled, too; but he thought he did his duty, when he whipped you; and, Theodore, I don't know but he did.'

"'Mother,' says he, 'I often need whippin'; I s'pose I do; I know I often do wrong, and if you'd whip me, I wouldn't say a word, if it was twice as hard; but I never will let him whip me again, as long as I live. He can't do it now, unless I choose, for I'm as strong as he is, any day, and he never shall again. But, when I'm wicked, you just lay your little finger on me, and I'll stop.'

"But, la! the boy can't always stop. He wa'n't made

so.' He was born in just a year after I was married, and in that time I'd had a good deal to contend with. Ye see, my father was a farmer, and well enough off, but he had a good many children, and so of course the most any of us ever got was our bringing up. Still, we had a *good* bringin' up, and a better education than was common in them times, especially for girls. I was just about nineteen when Moses came a-courtin' me. I knew he was poor; but, then, he was a good, stout young man, and had red cheeks and curly hair, and I didn't know no harm of him. My father and brothers were all steady, industrious folks, and made a good living, and I didn't sort o' realize but what all men was just so. So I married Moses. Well, we hadn't been married a month before I found out he would drink. Then, all along, during that year, it came out that he wa'n't no great worker, and if we had children I'd got to do the biggest part of bringin' 'em up. Now, it wa'n't that I didn't want to work, for I was always willing that way, but it was *the being disappointed in him*, that cut me. Then a good many girls, that I'd been brought up right alongside of, had done a sight better'n I had, and they kind o' set themselves up over me. I'd always had a proud spirit, and carried my head pretty high, and they was mighty glad to get a chance to crow over me; and the upshot of it was, that all that summer, before Theodore was born, I had spells of feelin' just as if I could tear things all to pieces. I guess Moses had his patience pretty well tried with me; but, then, he *is* patient, and don't never scold as some men do, even when he's in liquor. He ain't the worst man there is, on the whole; and I think, 's likely as not, is just the right man for me, after all. But you see, looking back to them days, I know just exactly what it is that makes Theodore the boy he is; and I can kind o' pity him, and have patience with him, when his father can't see nothing in him but just the very Evil One.

"It ain't no wonder to me that men don't understand women. They've always called them queer and inconsistent, and always will, till they find out how much there is in a woman's life that they don't know, and never can. A woman knows what's in a man better than he does himself, for she's naturally the mother of men. She knows better than anybody else but the Great Maker, what goes to the making of a man; but a woman carries a secret with her from the day she is a woman, to the day she dies, which no man can wholly understand. So, why shouldn't men find 'em queer? But it is great presumption for them to set themselves up over women on that account, for it's just like boasting of their ignorance."

"But, you know that men assert that the badge of womanhood is the badge of shame and weakness."

"Well, that's more than they can prove. A woman isn't so strong to dig potatoes as a man; but she's a great deal stronger to bear suffering, to rule her own spirit, and so to rule her family. A great deal stronger in faith, and hope, and courage, and love; and which is the better kind of strength, I'd like to know. As for the shame of it, when you'll show me a man who is ashamed of having had a good mother, then I'll own that his mother ought to be ashamed of having borne him. Otherwise, I do say there ain't anybody in this world that can take higher rank than a good mother. And if she's set apart by nature to that office, purified and refined from month to month, and year by year, made less strong that she may be less gross, is that any disgrace to her? I tell you, it's just because women don't think enough of these things for themselves, but take the low estimate men form of them for gospel, and then live down to it, that woman's calling is no more honored in the world. And so women, when they get ambitious, try to be men, or as near to it as they can come, never thinking that a noble womanhood is some-

thing with a great deal more in it than any manhood? That's what makes me so out of patience with these Woman's Rights folks."

"Mrs. Moss, why do not women who know and feel these things, mothers who through years of suffering and experience have learned them to be facts, why don't they say more about them?"

"Well, it is the nature of a woman to hide things. I wouldn't say what I've said to you, to any man, and there's plenty more like me. God made us so, and I suppose He knew what He was about when He did it. It's a *woman's secret*, and one which never has been fully told."

"But it seems to me that it ought to be told openly, for the very good of men themselves, that they may learn more deeply to reverence and cherish that which is after all the highest gift bestowed upon the race."

"I suppose sometime it will be, when men are fit to receive it. It is no use to throw pearls before swine, you know. But I tell you there's many a woman who has lived and suffered years and years, having her children, and bringing them up with little help from her husband, doing the work of two, and making her hair gray before it's time, who never could have lived, if in some silent, dumb way, she hadn't felt all these things to be true. It is God's gift to woman to see when man is blind. And if he don't choose to take the light from her, he plods on in the dark, while she goes singing in the day, and gets called crazy for it, too. Why, there's plenty of men who don't know any more about the real lives of the women that live in their houses, than they know about Timbuctoo. If my husband was to hear me talk as I'm talking now, he'd think I was stark mad."

"Very possibly," said Rebecca, "for I own myself quite surprised that a woman who has always had so much work

to do as you have, should have found so much time to think, or should have gained so much wisdom by thinking."

"I tell you, Miss Rebecca, when a woman is sitting up all night by herself, with her sick child, she ain't never alone. I don't care how humble her home is, there's visitors from heaven in it. They comfort and they soothe, and they teach such lessons as you don't find nowhere's else. You may talk about wise men, and godly men, but I tell you that there's poor, distressed mothers, that has been nearer to heaven, and had heaven's wisdom brought nearer to them, than any man ever did. But to come back to my boy, Theodore. I'm fully convinced that he'll come out all right, if only his father don't prove to be the ruin of him. He tells him he'll certainly come to States' prison, or the gallows, and whips him, and scolds him beyond reason; and it does try me so, sometimes, that it seems to me I shall give up altogether. But, then, if a mother ever gave up, what would the world come to? He don't love to go to school, and I'm afraid it don't do him much good to go, and he hates to work out on the farm. I do wish I could get him something to do that he would like, for then I think he would have some ambition, and begin to show out the good that I really think there is in him."

"He is young yet," said Rebecca, "and we must have patience. In the course of a year or two, I hav'n't a doubt but he will find something to do. It is a hard time for you, just now, I suppose, because he is so large that it costs something to keep him, and his father naturally thinks he ought to be turning his time to account. He must be made to be patient, that is, if that miracle can be wrought. Men are not naturally patient, you know."

"Yes; and you see his father is bent upon making a shoemaker of him, and that he never will be. Didn't I use to hate the sight of that bench, and the sound of the

hammer, and the very smell of the wax and the leather, after Jane Meredith called me, right in the sewing society, before all the folks, a cobbler's wife! I know that Theodore would kill himself before he'd ever be a cobbler. But his father can't know it."

"I will tell you," said Rebecca, "I will have a talk with Mr. Moss about Theodore."

"I do wish you would; a word from you will be worth a whole sermon from me. He needn't know, of course, that I've said anything to you."

"Oh! certainly not. I will see him, perhaps this very evening, as I go home. I shall be apt to meet him coming from the village."

It was near sunset, and the children began to come in, clamorous for supper. Pamela was already dressed, in the most approved style, and it was quite time that Rebecca should go home. There was a quiet good-bye with Mrs. Moss, and a boisterous farewell with the children, and a promise to come again, and then she stepped out into the soft, dewy twilight. At the gate, however, she met Moses, and remembered her promise. Moses had a thorough respect for Rebecca, mingled with gratitude, and he always felt that his dwelling had been honored, when she had paid it a visit. After passing a remark or two, she said carelessly:

"What a fine boy Theodore is growing, Mr. Moss. He is as handsome as a picture," which in truth was no great exaggeration, "and smart, too. You must look out for him. If you give him a good chance at business, by and by, he will make his fortune. He will be a son for you to lean upon in your old age."

"Do you think so?" said Moses. "He's a masterful unruly fellow, now."

"Oh! he has plenty of spirit, I know. That is the very reason I say he will never settle down to any sort of hum-

drum life. He'll push his fortune with a will, one of these days."

"Maybe," said Moses. "I know if I'd had more spirit at his age, I might have been something more than a cobbler all my life."

Rebecca passed on, and left Moses meditating over the gate. That was the last of his trying to make a cobbler of Theodore.

Rebecca walked homeward slowly, through the rich June dusk, the new moon shining silvery and clear over her right shoulder—she playfully marked the omen—and stars glinting out in the wide azure fields above. Violets and wild honeysuckle made the cool night air heavy with their sweetness, and from the pine grove, over which the moon's soft sickle hung, night-birds screamed, and the distance and the dewy air softened the dissonance of their voices to something that was wild and wailing and half prophetic.

"It is a noble thing to be a woman," thought Rebecca; "to be a worker in spiritual rather than material things; to be born to an unselfish rather than a selfish vocation. Let the dead past bury its dead. I have still my womanhood. Living true to that, my life may gather yet some few stray gleams of sunshine."

She looked abroad over the soft landscape drawn in shadow and overhung with rosy light, and something of its infinite beauty and repose entered into her soul. Some dim association brought to her mind a quaint passage which she had read in Plato years ago, and she repeated it aloud:

"Man's soul in a former state was winged and soared among the gods. And so it comes to pass in this life, that when the soul, by the power of music, or poetry, or the sight of beauty, hath her remembrance quickened, forthwith there is a struggling and a pricking pain as of

wings trying to come forth; even as in children teething.'"

Palpitating echoes in the air caught the murmur and wafted it back to her, and a voice seemed to whisper—

"Raise thy wings, O spirit! If the material atmosphere returns thy voice to thee, shall not the spiritual ether respond also to thine efforts? Have patience—wait."

The doctor's conversation recurred to her mind, but that brought only painful associations.

"It is not for me," she said, "to wrong any good man by encouraging him to love me. What I have suffered, I have suffered alone. I thank God that no human heart has thus far borne a single pang for me. Alone, please God, I will suffer to the end, rather than bring the shadow of disgrace to any man's hearthstone. And yet—"

Oh! weary heart, boast not thy strength or thy weakness. God alone knoweth either the one or the other.

Coming in sight of the house, she saw Nancy sitting in the kitchen porch socially entertaining Lucretia, who had run over for a few minutes' chat.

"This delicious twilight brings out the night-birds," thought Rebecca; and then she fell to pitying the forlorn and loveless state of these two ancient spinsters. How narrow their horizons! How contracted their sympathies! What failures their lives had been in richness, and blessing, and inspiration. They had known so little suffering. They had gathered so little increase. Welcome pain! welcome reproach! welcome unrequited weariness, rather than this stagnation—this death in life. Mrs. Moss, with her shiftless husband and her brood of turbulent children, was a queen to them.

As she passed them, she caught a quaint and characteristic bit of dialogue. Lucretia had been recounting her trials. People in the village, shameless gossips! had

been spreading scandalous reports, to the effect that she had been trying to inveigle Joel, the doctor's man, into matrimony. It had gone so far that the doctor had twitted her of it that very day. She was afraid Nancy might have had a hand in it. She had always thought Nancy had had an eye on him herself, ever since they lived at Mr. Gladstone's together, and she had come right over to see.

Nancy had emphatically cleared her skirts of the misdemeanor, and then Lucretia had launched out into terrible invectives against whoever had so sinned.

"Never mind," said Nancy, consolingly; "they'll get their reward in the next world, if they don't in this. That is always such a comfort."

"There ain't no certainty about that," said Lucretia, tartly. "Just before they die, they'll, like as not, repent and be forgiven; and that's what provokes me."

The moon was flinging a single silvery beam into Rebecca's chamber. When she had thrown off her bonnet, she knelt in the white circle of its radiance and thanked God—not for peace, but for pain; not for contentment, but for aspiration.

XII.

THE SILENT SHREW.

One warm Sabbath in July, Wyndham was electrified by a new sensation. Mrs. Abraham Gladstone had fainted in church. It is not to be supposed that this was the first indication which that lady had shown of "feeling the heat" in an unusual manner. Far from it. For nearly a month she had given unmistakable evidence of unusual sensitiveness in that direction. She persisted, in all weathers, in sleeping with her chamber windows wide open, somewhat to the annoyance of Mr. Gladstone, who was subject to colds in the head. All day long, and every day, she kept the house in an equally well ventilated condition; at least, so it seemed to Mr. Gladstone, who never entered it but he found a breeze like a northwester careering through it, which, while it was sometimes welcome, at others produced the sensation of a cold shower-bath. Mr. Gladstone suggested fans, which suggestion being received in silence, he brought home and distributed through the house a half dozen substantial palm leaves. Not one of them, that he could discover, was ever removed from the place where he had put it; but still the doors and windows were so set as to fan the house with incessant draughts. Years of experience had taught Mr. Gladstone the utter uselessness of expostulations. Mrs. Gladstone never talked, but she had a habit of self-defense akin to that of some otherwise impotent animals. She filled the house with the odor of her martyrdom, to that extent that no person with ordinary olfactory sensibilities could abide in it. Mr. Gladstone was convinced that it wasn't palm leaves that she wanted, and possessed

himself with the requisite patience to find out what it was. On that memorable Sunday, when she had fainted and been carried out by the gentlemen, she had been arrayed in her best, including the blue silk, and the lace flounce. When, therefore, Mr. Gladstone had suggested: "Melissa, if you would use a fan, I think you wouldn't get so faint," and the suggestion had been received with the accustomed silence, it occurred to him, by some subtle law of association, that the quaint old combination of wire and turkey feathers which did duty in their pew, as a moderator of the weather, would not accord perfectly with Mrs. Gladstone's attire. Mrs. Gladstone, he knew, was a martyr to the proprieties. He felt certain that she would die, or, at the least, faint in the most graceful and approved style, before she would consent to use a thing in the least degree inferior to what she considered due to her position. Mr. Gladstone felt relieved, and without another word went right away to Parker's, and bought a fan of scarlet silk and sandal wood, which he brought home and duly presented to his wife.

She was sitting on the sofa in their little sitting-room; the pretty basket work-stand which she so delighted in drawn close beside her, and Echo snuggled in the corner of the sofa, and covered with his gay colored afghan. Nothing could be cosier or more tempting than the picture thus presented.

"Melissa," said Mr. Gladstone, sitting down beside her, "I was in at Parker's to-day, and saw a pretty fan, at least I thought it pretty, and as I have noticed, lately, that you have no handsome fan, I bought it for you. I hope it will please you."

Mrs. Gladstone took the opened box, which contained the fan, and glancing at it, without even taking it out, laid it into the work-basket.

"It is very pretty."

It was not, all things considered, a very satisfactory acceptance; but, then, Abraham reflected that his wife was not a talker, a fact upon which he had prided himself not a little before their marriage—he had learnt wisdom since, and strove to be content.

Melissa certainly looked very pretty that evening. She was always faultlessly neat and tasteful in her appearance. She was, besides, a good housekeeper, and very exact and conscientious about nearly all the details of her manner and conduct. For instance, she would have cut off her hand, or, more expressive still, would have denied herself, for a season, of any darling elegance in dress, before she would run in debt; and no man had less cause than Abraham Gladstone to complain of his wife's conduct toward her gentlemen acquaintances. It had sometimes occurred to Abraham, that a larger and more liberal soul might have been less guarded at some of these points, without, at the same time, trespassing against any reasonable bounds. However, that he felt might be drawing rather too fine a line; and he satisfied himself with saying, that, on the whole, Melissa was in these respects a model wife.

Then, she was his first love; all the romance and sentiment of his youth had clustered about her, and you know

“You may break, you may shatter the vase, if you will,
The scent of the roses will hang round it still.”

On this particular evening, Abraham felt a kindly return of the love of his youth; and as Melissa sat there, stitching busily at some delicate trifle of muslin, he was strongly tempted to be affectionate. So, putting his arm about her waist, he said:

“Melissa, I think you might lay aside that work for a few minutes, and just make yourself entertaining. I don't know when I've held your hand in mine for a minute, as I used to, before we were married.”

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His purpose was very apparent, but then it was also very innocent. With a scarcely perceptible motion, she drew herself away from him, and replied, in that calm, even voice—the voice that never scolded:

“Mr. Gladstone, you forget yourself.”

Abraham's dream dissolved in an instant. He kissed her because he would kiss her, she receiving the caress under a silent protest; and then he found a book, and taking refuge in an easy chair, beguiled the remainder of the evening with a Treatise on the Marriage Contract.

Abraham watched carefully for the first appearance in public of the new fan. He watched in vain. He had a well founded belief that it had never been taken from its box. At last, after several weeks had elapsed, during which, however, the house had returned to its normal condition respecting ventilation, he one day inquired:

“Melissa, why do you never carry your new fan?”

“The odor of sandal-wood is very offensive to me.”

“Why, in the name of all the saints, didn't you tell me that before?”

“I supposed you knew it.”

Abraham shut his teeth together. It was of no use to talk. He could not say anything to acceptance, unless he were to say exactly the thing which she was bent upon making him say, and what that was he had not as yet the most remote idea. He made a blind effort, fortunately in the right direction.

“If you never intend to use the fan, perhaps you had better take it to Parker, and ask him to exchange it for one you can use.”

“I think the price of this fan was six dollars. He has one for twelve, that would suit me precisely; but that, I am aware, is more than you are able to pay.”

“Not at all,” said Abraham, “anything for peace,” and he took out the money, and gave it to her at once. He

was presently made to regret the last exclamation, for her martyr-like silence recalled it to him every hour of that day, and many days thereafter.

Mrs. Gladstone went down to Parker's, the next morning, and exchanged the red fan for a blue one, the exact shade of her dress, with elegantly cut pearl sticks. When the coveted article was fairly in her possession—

“Now,” she said to herself, “if Lucy Ellery should be married this fall, as I think she will, I am ready for the wedding. I can go as well dressed as Mrs. Darrell, if not better.”

It was a most important and desirable consummation.

To Abraham, meanwhile, the bitterest part of his poverty was the poverty of his home-life. He was struggling manfully with his pecuniary burden. He had many discouragements, but against them all he made headway. There were days, it is true, when his labor was hard and exhausting; when, from those who were his open friends, he experienced secret enmity; when the selfishness, the rivalry, the combativeness that must enter largely into the life of the successful man, made sad inroads upon his patience, his temper, his faith. At such times he fully realized how it was that woman was made a helpmeet for man; a fountain of spiritual strength in reserve, a portion of heavenly grace and benediction, incarnated and placed in his home for the daily and hourly reinforcement of his spiritual nature. In his own peculiar nook at home hung a little copy of Ary Schaffer's Dante and Beatrice, and to his hungry soul there seemed a peculiar significance in the attitudes of the figures. The poet looks up to the woman, the woman looks up to heaven; and, as he studied the picture, he saw plainly how the struggles of a man's hard, material life, make him unfit for the direct influence of the heavenly wisdom. His eyes grow blurred with looking so much through vapors; his senses grow dulled with

the constant giving and receiving of blows. How fit and meet, then, that in the sacred refuge of home shall be one whose very offices keep alive constantly her spiritual nature, and through whose innocent caresses and pure endearments heaven's blessings may descend to his weary soul. The man who looks thus upon his wife will never regard her physical weakness or incapacity as a proof of inferiority. If earth were all, if there were no heaven above us, the giant would be the highest type of human life. If we take the spiritual world into the account, who is so near it, who draws so fully and so freely from it, as the true, perfected woman?

One step farther. If Mrs. Gladstone was a stunted, abortive, imperfect specimen of womankind, who made her so to differ from nobler representatives of her sex? Not herself, surely, for she was essentially what she was born, and what circumstances had made her. If her soul was dark and narrow, and conditioned all around by strong desires and ingrained prejudices, it was, nevertheless, just what was given her by her parents, modified by some months, more or less, of ante-natal experience. A deep seer has said, "The gate of gifts closes at one's birth;" and to her forming had gone little that was broad, or wise, or tender, or true. Is it best, by ignorance and unwise restraint, to multiply such mothers upon the face of the earth?

Cultivation may do much—the Spirit of God may do much more—but no power of God Himself has ever been made manifest that can change the essential and ingrained attributes of a human soul. The man or the woman that is born narrow, or sensual, or arbitrary, may be modified by after influences, but can never become, in any large sense, truly broad, or pure, or gentle.

On a day of this same July, Rebecca took Evelyn out on a berrying excursion along the roadside. The bushes

were few, and their success was not cheering. Just as they were about to turn their steps homeward, however, a carriage appeared upon the road, and Mr. Gladstone's voice cried out in its gayest tone to Evelyn:

"How, now, little one? Raspberries are scarce here, are they not?"

Mr. Gladstone was fond of children, and had somehow contracted a special predilection for Evelyn Darrell, which, with the usual spontaneity of children, she cordially returned:

"Yes, indeed," replied Evelyn. "Mr. Gladstone, where are *your* raspberry bushes? You told me that you had the finest in town."

"So I have. Jump into the buggy with me, and I'll show them to you."

"Come, Reba," said Eva, eagerly.

Rebecca hesitated for a moment. Then reflecting that what would be discretion in a young lady might seem mere prudery in a children's nurse, she followed the lead of the impatient child. Mr. Gladstone noticed that momentary hesitation. It led him to bestow more attention upon Rebecca than he might otherwise have done. His instantaneous reflection was —

"What a very ladylike looking person for a child's nurse."

He had intended to lift Eva over the wheel without himself alighting, but that glance at Rebecca changed his resolution, and he sprang out and assisted them both into the vehicle. All this was by-play, however. His main object was evidently to enjoy a chat and a frolic with Evelyn.

"My raspberry bushes are out in a field," he said, "and I have not the least idea how I am to get a young lady like you over the fence."

"Oh! but I can climb any fence in this town. My uncle says I'm a romp."

"Oh! the doctor's an old fogy."

"An old what! Mr. Gladstone, isn't that slang?"

"There! I knew I should shock such a prim young woman as you are. I'm about sorry I offered to show you the raspberries after all."

"Mr. Gladstone, you are not the least sorry—you know you are not. But you don't like my uncle, and I do."

"On the contrary, I like him immensely—all the better because he has such a charming little niece."

"You are flattering me, and I shall tell Mrs. Gladstone," said Evelyn, whom his raillery had provoked to play the prude.

"Ah! no you will not," said Mr. Gladstone. "I shall kiss you—first on one cheek, like that! and then on the other, so! and you will not dare to tell Mrs. Gladstone even then."

Evelyn screamed, and just then they arrived at the field. Mr. Gladstone alighted and hitched the horse, prophesying all the time that he should never be able to get Evelyn over the fence. But, finally, he lifted her out in his arms, and, giving a spring, jumped the fence himself and set her safely down upon the other side.

"Now," he said, "you must excuse me a moment, while I go back for your governess."

He went over the fence this time a little more circumspectly, and politely assisted Reba.

Rebecca had listened all the while to the cheery sound of his voice, and felt what a large, pure, noble soul it was that could so disport itself with a little child. As he suddenly turned to come toward her, however, there was something in his manner, or perhaps some expression of his face, which struck her as painfully familiar.

As he turned away with Eva, to help her pull down the bushes, she had a good opportunity to study his face. It was strong, open, honest.

"Oh!" she said to herself, "I see; it is the cleft chin. Am I never to see a cleft chin again, but that old ghost shall rise to haunt me? It was that, then, together with the dark visage, which deceived me in that picture of the doctor's. It is a family trait repeated here. I am glad to put that doubt to rest."

In truth it had vaguely troubled her, ever since the day when she had fainted at sight of the doctor's pocket-case; but now she dismissed it altogether from her mind, and quietly enjoyed the high spirits and rather rollicking fun of her companions. Presently, in some rash escapade, Evelyn scratched her arm with a long thorn of the raspberry bushes. She screamed, and Mr. Gladstone instantly became all regret and sympathy. It was a long and deep mark, and Rebecca drew forth her handkerchief and bound it up.

"What a graceful, womanly way she has for a servant," thought Mr. Gladstone, "and so much true feeling, too. There must be a story about her. I will ask Darrell some time."

They walked along the fence for a quarter of a mile, picking the berries as they went. By that time their baskets were quite full, and they started to retrace their steps. Evelyn was growing tired, and her glee was less noisy; and, to fill the pauses of their talk, Mr. Gladstone was obliged to address himself to Reba.

It was simple chat, a mere observation upon the fineness of the berries this year, and the promise of fruit in the orchards; but Rebecca's voice, and the refined construction of her sentences, deepened the impression of her face and bearing. As Mr. Gladstone left her with Eva, at Mr. Darrell's gate, he thought to himself:

"Melissa is quite as delicately feminine and pretty as this woman. Ah! why has she not more of that dewy softness in her eye, more of that tremulous music in her voice?"

But he checked himself. Most men in his circumstances would have held at least the fancy free to roam. Not Abraham Gladstone. Besides that the circumstances of his life filled him with grave and noble thought, to the exclusion of all trifling and dalliance, the innate honesty of the man held him true to his sacred pledge: "To forsake all others, and keep you only unto her." The words had a meaning to him which he dared not ignore or scorn. But, if he had no right to sigh over this woman's charms, there was no law, human or divine, to prevent his yielding to her the respectful admiration which a true manhood ever accords to a pure and tender womanhood.

Thereafter, however preoccupied, he never met her on the street without a grave recognition and a courteous gesture.

XIII.

CHIEFLY METAPHYSICAL.

The beautiful October weather came, and still Mrs. Darrell gained little relief. Her husband had grown to regard her malady as a pardonable mental weakness. It was the drawback upon having a wife, that most of them were subject to some such unreasonable freak. He tried to bear the trial philosophically, and even with Christian resignation, though it must be confessed that sometimes, when she lay awake for nearly the whole night, or worse, got so restless, so beset with baleful shadows and horrible sounds and surmises that she could no longer stay in bed, but was fain to rise and light a lamp to dispel her demons, his temper nearly failed him. However, on the whole, he behaved with quite exemplary moderation.

He must occasionally, to be sure, have his joke at her expense; mimic her sighs, tease her whims, call her his melancholy Ophelia, and warn her that, if she committed suicide, she needn't expect Christian burial; and all this not exactly in that loving kind of banter which amounts to a caress, but with a spice of sarcasm, which cut deeply into the sensitive heart of the suffering woman.

Whereupon the doctor soliloquized: "The men of each generation make fools of themselves after their own fashion. Fifty years ago, men worked their wives as they would have thought it folly to work their brutes, in the same condition. The consequence is, that the women of to-day are physically only to be put in glass cases, and kept out of harm's way, like other ornamental ware. But they are fine grained, full of feelings and susceptibilities which their mothers never knew, and which their husbands

—make fun of. They say women and black men are specially cursed in the Bible. White men go free. It's just—as—well. The Lord knew that their—blindness and—wrong-headedness would make it about even."

But Laura, often wounded, bore no malice. "It is hard," she said, "for Ralph to have such a miserable apology for a wife. I do hope, when the fall weather comes, I shall get stronger."

So, every day she took her spiritless frame out upon the sunny hillsides, and basked in the October glory, and pulled the asters, and the golden-rod; and gazing dreamily off into the delicious hazy distance, wondered, and wondered, and wondered—why God, who is goodness, made women as He did; and making them so, a sealed mystery, a labyrinth of strange uses and seemingly contradictory meanings, why He had given to no mortal being the clue thereof. And she prayed earnestly, fervently, for light; light for herself, and light for others of her sex. And so her days went on.

At the back of the house, and across a smooth ravine, rose a rocky hill, crowned at the top with a pine grove. Stunted pines and bay-berry bushes grew here and there over the hillside; but there were smooth, open patches of mossy turf, and broad plateaus of ledge, where Laura delighted to sit and drink in the warm October sunshine. It seemed to her that the blue sky overhead, the affluence of the golden air saturated with the aromatic breath of the pines, and made musical by their almost articulate murmurs, the broad expanse of the landscape before her, and the tender, delicious distance, were all medicaments of rare and potent worth. In the grove above her the children played with Rebecca, gathering pine cones, or tossing about the fragrant leaves, or mimicking, with childish glee, the cawing of the crows that yearly built in the topmost branches of the trees.

As the day waned, the children would come shouting down the hillside, toward her, bringing such treasures as they had gathered; usually recounting to her some story, with which Rebecca had managed to hold their attention, and so keep them within the sound of her voice. Sometimes it was the tale of a fern leaf, that ages ago prayed for immortality, and so, through fire, and flood, and great upheavings, was turned to stone, and lives to-day in the slaty ledges of the mountains. Sometimes it was about the great pine forests, which moaned and sighed through unnumbered ages that a soul might be given them—and the pines moan and sigh to this day, with that remembered agony; how they were swept with devouring flames and transformed to immense repositories of fossil coal; and then, when they had lain other ages in the deep, deep bosom of the earth, were put again to torture of man's devising, and there leaped forth that bright, ethereal flame-spirit, that makes our homes beautiful by night, and lights up, like a torch from Heaven, the unsightly abodes of crime. Or, it was a fairy tale of how a nymph grew weary of her ocean home, and prayed for a respite from the never ceasing murmur of the sea, and a dwelling among the green bowers of earth. How her prayer was granted, and she was imprisoned in her shell, and thrown by strong tides upon the shining beach. There an artist found the shell, and seeing, by his inner vision, the imprisoned nymph, with his chisel set her free, and she became a cameo. Thus, by arraying grave truths in the garments of a pure and beautiful fiction, were their tender minds both amused and instructed, their fancy stirred, their imagination given wings, and their hearts touched with tenderness.

"I believe," said Mrs. Darrell one day, "I will keep you with me, Reba, and let the children go into the woods by themselves. I think I need you most."

So the children strayed off, and the two women sat on the outcropping surface of a great granite ledge, and talked.

"I want to know," said Mrs. Darrell, "if it ever seems to you that you retain impressions of a previous state of existence. Can you not look back in some dim, vague way, upon a life that preceded this, and seems some way of deeper, grander import?"

Reba replied dreamily: "I look back thus upon my childhood. Beyond that, I have no glimmer of reminiscence."

Laura refrained from questions. A determined questioner is a nuisance; a person forever prying about the roots of one's cherished delicacies with his intrusive, inevitable spade. These two women were both of too fine a fiber for that.

"I have heard the same remark made before," said Reba, "but it always seemed to me that the phenomenon must be referable to one or other of two causes. It seems to me that I can easily imagine impressions made so strongly upon the mother's mind as to leave a life-long imprint upon the mind of the child. The connection between child and mother during the ante-natal period is so strong, that it seems to me fairly to cover these impressions. Or, it may be referable to the double consciousness of the soul, a thing at present so mistily understood, that I think the less said about it the better, except to mark such phenomena concerning it as are well known and authenticated. After all, I am no metaphysician, and scarcely competent to speak at all on the subject."

"But it seems to me, Reba, that without, perhaps, being richly gifted with logical powers, you have that purely feminine quality of the intellect, intuition, rarely developed. I like what you say, because it always goes

to the heart of a thing, without, perhaps, leaving a well beaten path behind. Now, I have more of my father in me, intellectually, than of my mother; so I reason better than I see."

"As you grow womanly through suffering," said Reba, "your vision will grow clearer. Men have to walk instead of soaring, because the exercise of their lives does not develop their wings, or, to speak literally, their spiritual insight. Let the most manly man but suffer deeply enough, and his wings begin to grow straightway; he begins to speak intuitionally, that is, in the speech of women, the speech of angels."

"Which shows the exceeding consistency of setting reason above insight; a life of labor above a life of endurance."

The carriage came up the road to take Mrs. Darrell and the children into the village, and Rebecca lingered alone among the pines. Lying down upon the soft and fragrant couch which the years had spread for her, and resting her head upon the trunk of a fallen tree, in a sorrowful, dejected way, she began a sort of unconscious review of her life, the pines all the while whispering their mournful cadences through her soul.

There were times, one cannot deny it, when her bruised and broken heart yearned for deeper comfort, more abounding strength, than her circumstances afforded her. There were haunting memories that would not be laid, but which made the watches of many a night sleepless and tearful. Eyes that would flash on her through dreams, tones that freighted every wind, the "touch of vanished hands" that thrilled her hour by hour as she went about her daily duties. This and that surging aspiration, which is at once the bane and the blessing of every noble heart; which breaks up the soul's peace and makes wreck and ruin of many patient graces, but which also

tides grand resolves over sandy bars and shallow flats, and transforms an infinite calm into an infinite grandeur.

With her mind thus unsettled, and its most orderly forces in revolt, who can measure the force of the temptation which the doctor's evident partiality afforded her? Only the evening before, under pretense of seeing how Mr. Darrell's new preventive of curculio worked, he had sought her in the garden, and sitting by her side in the honeysuckle arbor, had talked with her in a way in which she knew the doctor was not in the habit of talking to most women. She recalled the soft luster of his deep, gray eyes, the light touch of his hand, as it had rested for a moment upon her shoulder, the silent tenderness with which he had guarded her from the evening dampness. She thought, with throbs of yearning and desire, what it would be to her to live in his house, to find there protection, companionship, the right to love and be loved; and then, knowing what barrier stood in the way, she buried her face in her hands and wept convulsively.

"The days of God are a thousand years," whispered the inner voice to Rebecca, as she lay there like a bruised sea-flower, stranded on a hard, though shining beach. "Gird thy soul with patience and wait."

Suddenly there came to her a flash of vision. The whole immense universe of God wheeled slowly before her eyes; star intersecting star in its orbit; sun balancing sun; system answering to system, in perfect harmony and equipoise. All in swift motion, too, through distances which made speed itself seem slowness, and moving with such precision and mutual dependence, that the least mischance to one must disarrange the whole.

"Behold," said the voice, "all this hath the Father planned since before the ages were. Till this time hath been no flaw, no discord. Is He able, do you think, to order your little life aright? Is His universe of stars more

precious to Him than His universe of souls? Shall He care for the one and despise the other? Trust Him and wait."

There was a great influx of light in Rebecca's soul, and she went down to her home full of peace and joy. The vision had left behind a prophesy. From that hour she knew that, whether or not she had ordained it, her Father had ordained for her—change; and in the far future perhaps, yet a future toward which she was traveling with the swiftness of the stars over the infinite spaces of heaven—rest, peace.

Such moments of ecstasy are more truly elevating and refining than any intellectual process. They lift the soul in an instant to a point which labor can never attain, and the remembrance of which, though the wave recedes, the soul never entirely loses.

Rebecca took up again the commonplaces of her life, with new faith, new patience. Her heart had gathered strength; and, when the duties of the day were done, she found a moment's time to run over to Miss Joanna's nursery, to undress the little Catherine, and rub her rosy limbs, to kiss her pretty cheeks, and at last to rock her to sleep upon her bosom. Then she sat by the crib, and watched the little sleeper, while Miss Joanna chatted.

"You cannot imagine how fond I am getting of this child. I, who never used to love babies at all, except at a distance. I had not the least adaptation to them. What it was that set Milton thinking that a babe would be company for me, I cannot divine. But then, Milton is a wonder of comprehension, when there is a woman concerned. I shall never forget how amazed I was that morning, as I saw him coming up the walk, that strange nurse-girl with him, and this child. I ran up stairs, I assure you I did, without stopping for an explanation. Mamma exclaimed, 'Milton, what have you done now?' I heard it as I went up the stairs. 'Brought Joanna a present from New

York,' said Milton, with that imperturbable face of his. I thought at once, 'Oh! it is a black child. I have always had such an anti-slavery hobby.' So then I stole back again. But, no! it was this dear, little, delicate creature, as sweet as a May flower. It quite took my breath to look at her, I was so nervous in those days. It is impossible to say how much I have improved since then.

"'Whose is it?' I asked.

"'Yours,' said Milton.

"'No, but who are its parents?'

"'That I don't know, any more than you. I found it on the street, and saved it from the city alms-house.'

"I think I blushed. I am sure, when I thought, 'she is really mine, then,' my heart gave a great leap. It was such a thing to have a little babe like that to love, and to live for, and to feel was my own. But I could not say all that then. In fact, I think I manifested some reluctance to accept the charge. But that was soon over, and then I somehow felt so much younger and cheerier than I had for years.

"There had been a great sadness in my life. I think sometimes, as I look into your face, that you, too, know what heart-sorrow is, which is perhaps the reason I feel like telling you all these things. I had tried all the sources of consolation that I could think of, but none of them seemed to touch the springs of my life. I had read, I had studied, I had practiced charities in a quiet way; I was not born a colporteur, or a city mission agent; I got a piano, and tried music; I had attended prayer-meetings, and made use of all religious exercises, not without comfort; but everything I did seemed to have a morbid zest about it, until this dear child came. The baby fingers reached right down to my heart-strings, and in two days' time I felt human again."

There was a dainty stain of rose upon her cheek, and a

deep, absent look in her eye; and Rebecca, sitting opposite her, and seeing it all by the blaze of the wood-fire on the hearth, thought she had never seen so lovely a face.

They sat there in the silence, and the cheerful glow of the fire, Rebecca still rocking the baby's cradle, and tears hanging on the lids of both, when the doctor entered.

"Good evening, Rebecca," he said, kindly, drawing off his driving-glove, and extending his hand to her, in the quiet, friendly way, that had latterly marked his manner toward her. "The evening air grows chilly. There will be a frost, I think."

There was nothing of haste or excitement in his manner, as he sat down before the fire, and spread out his hands to warm them.

"The day has been very lovely," said Rebecca. "Mrs. Darrell, and the children, and I, have been out nearly all the afternoon. I think this autumn weather is reviving Mrs. Darrell."

"A trifle—a trifle, may be. I hope she'll get better soon; she'll need strength. Ralph Darrell—is—a—pretty sick—man."

"Is Mr. Darrell ill?" said Rebecca. "Then I must go at once."

"He was taken with a fainting fit, in his office, about an hour ago. I brought him home. It's going to be a fever. The fever—won't be—bad—I hope, but he's dreadful nervous; *dreadful—nervous.*"

The doctor held the words upon his tongue as if they had a comfortable relish.

"About as nervous a man as I ever saw. It'll be a job to take care of him. I don't—want—to—hurry you home—Rebecca—don't want to hurry you away—but I think, as like as not, Laura'd be glad to see you. Tell her I shall come over again, before I go to bed."

Rebecca hurried on her shawl, and started for home as

soon as possible. At the door she met Joel, the doctor's fat, lazy, faithful, good-natured man.

"The doctor said I'd better wait, miss, and take you over to Mr. Darrell's, as Mrs. Darrell, she's in a mighty hurry to have you get home," said Joel. "Better jump right inter the shay."

Rebecca needed no second invitation, and in three minutes' time Joel set her down at Mr. Darrell's door.

"Mighty fine woman, that is," said Joel; "doctor thinks so, too. Fact, I shouldn't a-thought on't if it hadn't been for him — though he never said nothing about her. Doctor's a judge of women. Wonder, if he was me, which he would choose — Nancy or Creeshy?"

This was a subject upon which Joel's mind had been greatly exercised for the last ten years, and he seemed to be no nearer a solution of the problem than ever. The doctor thought it was doubtful if ever he would be, unless he received some extraneous aid, and meditated offering him, sometime, a word of advice. He wasn't in any hurry about it, though. There was time enough yet.

XIV.

HYSTERICIS: MALE SPECIES.

Mr. Darrell was nervous, and with reason. For years he had applied himself assiduously to his business, without allowing himself time for that social and domestic relaxation which his system required. His business enterprises had always been, as compared to the capital invested in them, disproportionately large. The consequence was, that his mental powers were kept constantly on the alert, and strained to their utmost tension, to foresee and prepare for the varying contingencies of trade. He had thus far been uniformly successful, but at a cost of vital power, which he himself was the last to realize. A trifle of indigestion, neglected, induced a fever; and the system, ripe before for revolution, made vigorous preparations to avenge abuses.

When Rebecca reached home, she found the patient comfortably ensconced in his bed, and Mrs. Darrell sitting beside him, bathing his head with cologne and water. His eyes had a glassy stare in them, and his hand twitched nervously at the bed clothes. He was evidently in a very excited and restless state. Yet, as he had a strong masculine frame, and lacked those fine adjustments which render the female system peculiarly sensitive to nervous derangements, it cannot be supposed that his sufferings were extreme. They were quite sufficient, however, to upset both his reason and his temper.

"I'm a terribly sick man, Rebecca," he said. "I hope I shall get over it; but the doctor looked very grave. You will have to take care of the children and the housework, for I shall need my wife's care every moment.

Laura, what are your pillows made of? I should think this one was stuffed with cobble stones."

Mrs. Darrell put down her sponge, and proceeded to smooth his pillow; and Rebecca, after ascertaining that she could be of no immediate use, was leaving the room, to attend to her other duties, when Mr. Darrell called:

"Rebecca, the doctor left directions for preparing me some sort of gruel or toast water. Nancy never will do it as it should be done. Won't you attend to it yourself?"

Rebecca promised, and came back to receive her instructions from Mrs. Darrell. By that time cool water had to be brought from the kitchen, and then Mr. Darrell felt as if he needed mustard poultices on his feet, till at last Rebecca began to think that it would be midnight before she should get time to put the children to bed.

Mrs. Darrell watched with the patient, and she was kept constantly busy with his various demands and surmises. At one time she had placed a pillow at the back of her easy chair, and fancied, as her husband was quite comfortable, and declared his intention to go to sleep, that she also might get a doze. Hardly, however, had she closed her eyes, when he was sitting up in the bed, exclaiming in a startled whisper:

"Laura! there are robbers getting in at the dining-room window. Listen! don't you hear the rasping of the saw?"

"It is only a rat, my dear, gnawing in the wall."

"A rat! Laura, do you suppose I have common sense, or not? I tell you, it is burglars."

"Very well," said Laura, without stopping to remind him how many times her own nocturnal terrors had been made the theme of his scoffing and scorning, or to assure him that she had heard the same noise a thousand times when he was sound asleep, "I will take the lamp, and go down and see."

She went, and made a thorough investigation, but found nothing unusual.

"I am sure it was a rat," she said. "Now, do compose yourself, and try to get a little sleep."

"Laura, you speak of my composing myself, as if I *could* compose myself. If I could compose myself, I shouldn't be nervous. I tell you, when a man is nervous, he can't help it."

Laura smiled inwardly, but only said, in the kindest possible tone :

"I know that very well, my dear. I only meant that you should try to forget your fears, and go to sleep, if you could."

"I can't go to sleep. I tell you, Laura, I'm dreadful sick. I'll have Dr. Ferris called in to-morrow. I don't believe Milton knows anything about fevers; fevers, with nervous complications, I mean."

"Very well," said Laura; "there is no objection to your calling Dr. Ferris, if you like. I guess I had better give you a sleeping powder now, for you must go to sleep, if it is possible."

He took the medicine, and after that did get a little restless sleep; but, before morning, Rebecca was called up to make fresh mustard poultices; and as soon as the day broke, John was dispatched for the doctor.

"Shall I send him for Dr. Ferris?" asked Mrs. Darrell.

"Laura, how you talk! Do you suppose I want to be drugged to death? If I am to die, I prefer dying a natural death."

Which was all the same to Laura as if he had said :

"No, my dear, I have changed my mind."

Morning only made it more apparent that it was a case of settled fever—not alarming, but one which would probably keep him in his room for two or three weeks.

"Laura," said the doctor, "who are you going to get to watch, to-night?"

Mr. Darrell looked up in some alarm.

"Why, Laura, you don't think of leaving me, do you?"

"Oh, no!" she said; "at least, not at present. But I suppose I might have some one to help me a little, so that I can hold out the longer."

"Y-e-s," said Mr. Darrell, doubtingly; but I want *you*. I don't know what's the use of having a wife, if she can't take care of a man when he's sick."

"Ho-ho-ho!" said the doctor, pensively. "*Some rules don't work both ways.*"

"I *shall* take care of you, Ralph," said Mrs. Darrell, firmly. "I shall not leave you an instant, when I can help it. I know just how you feel, dear, and I would not for the world leave you."

He was somewhat reassured; but the doctor made certain that a good and faithful watcher was found each night to make Laura's duties less arduous.

To tell how many different kinds of drink were prepared for Mr. Darrell, each one a more miserable failure than the last; how many ways were devised to make his medicines palatable; how many times his wife was called to hear the noises in his head; how many times the doctor was asked if he did not think that something ailed him more than he knew of—would be a work of supererogation. Suffice it to say, that for a week he kept the house in a pretty continual state of uproar. At the end of that time, he had become so much reduced by his fever as to be in a quieter condition. But then he was like a child about his wife. She must sit by his bedside every moment, ready to give him anything he desired, and most of the time to hold his hand, or bathe his head, or, by some means of personal contact, impart the cool, quiet magnetism of her veins to him.

On one of those occasions, when she was holding his

hand in hers, and trying to compose him sufficiently to allow him to sleep, he exclaimed:

"I suppose, Laura, you think I'm very silly; but if you are ever nervous, you'll know."

Laura smiled. "I think, my dear, I do know all about it. I have seen a great many days when I would have given all I possessed, if you would have left your business for an hour or two and petted me a little."

"Why, Laura," he cried, light breaking in upon his darkened mind, "was that what ailed you?"

When the crisis of the fever was passed, and the pettishness of convalescence came on, there was another season when it seemed as if no human power could please him. At one time he demanded of Laura why she would persist in wearing her walking boots in his room; to which her only reply was to take off her delicate slipper and hold it up to his view, when he informed her that she certainly had the tread of an elephant. The next day he accused her of stealing about his room as stealthily as an Indian—she was as sly as a cat, any way. She was worn with watching and anxiety, and these things were hard to bear; but no one ever heard her answer him in any but the kindest tone, or knew her to abate one jot or tittle of her tenderness for him.

And Ralph, who was noble and large hearted in the main, appreciated every bit of it. As he lay there, weak as an infant, upon the bed, and watched his wife's untiring care and never failing patience, and, perhaps, thought how she herself had suffered when he had been indifferent, or even had made light of her sufferings, she seemed to him the very rose and queen of women. The love of his youth stirred in his veins, and he registered a vow, that if ever he got off that sick bed again, she should never more have cause to complain of his want of tenderness to her.

By and by, he was able to sit up for an hour or two at a time and hear her read. She began by bringing in a newspaper and asking if she should read him the money article. He raised his hand impatiently.

"No, indeed," he cried; "I can't abide that stuff yet. Laura, didn't you once say that you'd like to read 'Maud' to me. We shall never have a better time for that than now."

She read "Maud," and that only led the way to other things. They got among the magazines and re-read her favorite pieces, love stories and all, till at last they got to talking love, and seemed to be renewing their old courting days.

Ralph somehow felt a little as Rip Van Winkle must have, when he awoke from his long nap; for it was a great while since Ralph had thought much about these things. He remembered that he used to think Laura's taste a little immature and school-girlish; he wondered now to find what a cultivated woman she had grown to be. He was really proud of her, and felt rather ashamed of the blunders into which his unready memory sometimes led him.

They had read and talked in this way one evening till the twilight overtook them. Outside the window by which they had been sitting, the gray wintry landscape, whitened here and there by the first snow fall, stretched away to the horizon, where rosy lights and purple shadows, reflections of the fading sunset, still lingered. Within, a glowing fire in the grate made the dusk seem tender and cheerful. Laura was sitting very close to her husband, his arm about her, her head upon his shoulder, a touch of the old girlish abandon in her manner that stirred his heart with delicious memories. Presently he felt a soft commotion in her bosom, and then a tear fell on his hand, and another, and another.

"Laura, darling," he asked, "what is it?"

"God is so good," she whispered softly, "to have given me back my husband."

"Laura," he said, his own voice trembling now, "keep fast hold of him, and don't let him leave you again. I feel as the apostles did when they beheld the transfiguration. 'Let us build tabernacles; it is good for us to be here.'"

By and by, when the lamps were lighted, the doctor dropped in. He looked at them both; then sat down and looked into the fire, and whistled softly; no tune—he never whistled any tune—only a low, wind-like accompaniment to an unspeakable thought.

"You'll be getting out to business soon, I suppose, Darrell?" he said.

"In a day or two, perhaps. I'm in no hurry."

"I'm glad to hear it; glad to hear it."

Another pause. Another low symphony from his lips.

"Darrell, you have been talking a good while about going to Washington. When will you ever find a better time than now; say, in a week or two."

"That is sensible, doctor. Laura, what do you say? Can you be ready in a couple of weeks? That will give me time to go down to the office and look matters up a little, and then, if I find them all right, we'll be off. What do you say?"

Going to Washington was one of Laura's day dreams. To have it come true, just now, of all times, when Ralph would enjoy it with her so much more than usual, seemed almost too good, and she said so.

"No, indeed," said Ralph, "nothing is too good for this time. We'll have a sort of second honeymoon out of it. I'm going to be a better man, doctor. I'm not going to work so like a dog any more."

"H'm," said the doctor; "take your honeymoon while you are in the fit of it. I have seen sick-room repentances before."

"No; but it's dead earnest, this time," said Ralph.

"I hope so—I hope so," said the doctor. "If there is anything I can do, Laura, to help you off, let me know. You've got a good woman to leave with the children, and that is half the battle."

"Indeed it is," said Laura. And then, after a moment's chat about family matters, the doctor left.

Mr. and Mrs. Darrell were gone three weeks on their journey. They came back, at last, looking so well, so radiant, so youthful, that one could hardly believe they had been invalids when they set out.

Rebecca, thinking of her vision of the stars, saw how one life is made to depend upon another for its times and its seasons; how, sometimes, when we seem to be standing still, we are only making a little wider circuit, that we may catch the influence of some grander attraction, or avoid some clash of spheres fraught with unseen peril.

"For what do I wait?" she wondered; and the unseen spaces echoed, "Wait."

XV.

A DEED WITHOUT A NAME.

Abraham Gladstone came home from his office, one day, and found his wife in bed, with such a length of countenance and general aspect of immaculate suffering and martyred virtue, that he at once conjectured what was the trouble. In her determination to avoid maternal responsibilities, she had had an unusually severe struggle with nature, and her physical powers had for once been forced to succumb.

"My dear, are you ill?" he asked kindly.

"I'm not quite as well as usual."

"Shall I call the doctor?"

"By no means."

"But you look very much exhausted, and it seems to me you have some fever."

She was silent, and silence with her was never consent.

"I don't know whether you will find any dinner," she said. "Hepsey is not good for much, unless she has somebody to look after her."

"Oh, don't worry about me. What shall I get for you?"

"Nothing."

"Not a little gruel?"

"Such stuff as Hepsey could make?"

Abraham began to take the hint.

"Perhaps I had better get some person to come and stay with you a day or two. It don't seem to me that you will be able to get about the house to-morrow."

"I don't know of any one whom you could get."

"I think Mary Crane would come."

She was silent, and Abraham bethought himself that Mary was a very coarse, though a very good natured woman.

"Mrs. Gladstone could not abide coarseness. But whom to find, that would suit her, she could not think. Paragons of skill and elegance do not go out nursing in New England villages, as a general thing.

"I really don't know," he said at length, "of anybody better than Mary."

"Mrs. Darrell always manages to get good help," said Mrs. Gladstone; "but, then, she has money."

"I have heard that she had an excellent nurse-girl now; but I am afraid, Melissa, she will not be willing to part with her. One does not like to be unneighborly about those things, you know. Perhaps I can get mother to come over for a day or so."

Melissa said nothing. Mr. Gladstone knew, without being told, that Mrs. Bowditch was one of those women who are of no possible use in a sick room, but rather a nuisance, so he did not urge the matter.

When he came home at night, she was evidently so much worse, that he no longer asked her permission, but sent at once for the doctor. Mrs. Gladstone did not receive him very cordially, but the doctor had his own ways and means of arriving at knowledge.

"What are you going to do for help?" was the first question he asked, on rejoining Abraham in the sitting-room. "She'll have to lie where she is for a month, at least, and she'll want more care than that child can give her."

Abraham saw his opportunity. He remembered perfectly the impression which Rebecca had produced upon him, and he felt some personal repugnance to exposing the unhappiness of his domestic relations to a woman of her delicate perceptions; but this was not a time to think of himself.

"Do you suppose," he asked, "that it would be possible

to induce Mrs. Darrell to part with her nurse for a few weeks?"

The doctor was sitting by the fire. He looked thoughtful, whistled a little, rubbed his hands together slowly.

"I—don't—know," he said at last. "What made you think of Rebecca?"

"Help is very scarce, you know, and Mrs. Gladstone is very particular. She has heard that Rebecca, if that is her name, is an excellent and trusty woman, and, in a case like this, where the nurse will be in effect housekeeper also, it is of consequence to have a faithful person."

"Rebecca—is—just—what—you—want. I'll speak to Laura about it. Can't tell what she'll say. Women are set in their ways. I'll speak to her."

Abraham expressed his sense of obligation, and the doctor left.

"If that woman is *determined* to kill herself," soliloquized the doctor, as he untied the old gray, "I don't know as I can help it. I suppose I must do what I can, but I'm afraid she has dipped a little too deep, this time. She beats Death all out, and Dr. Hornbook was a boy to her."

This was just at the time of the January thaw. The roads were very slushy, and the doctor had driven far that day. When he at last reached home, he was constrained to see, with his own eyes, that the old gray had an extra quart of oats, and a good bed.

"Not that Joel ever neglects her," said the doctor. "Joel is faithful. I like a faithful person; I won't have anybody but a faithful person about me, if I can help it. Joel is faithful; but, then, I *sleep* better if I see to these things myself."

As he went about his work, he meditated:

"Rebecca needs a change. She is getting uneasy, and it is natural that she should. She ought to be taking a different position from that of a nurse-girl. She is a very

capable woman. If she gets out into the world, people will find it out, and respect her accordingly. *She had better go to Gladstone's.*"

It was past eight o'clock when the doctor reached Mrs. Darrell's house, to do the promised errand.

The children were out of the way, and Ralph and Laura sat in their pleasant library; she sewing, he reading aloud, the picture of domestic comfort and happiness. It put the doctor in his best humor to see them.

"Laura," he said, after a few minutes of desultory chat, "what are you going to do with Maude this spring; she looks pale; she's studying too hard. She must get some let-up some way?"

"I know she is studying hard, but I had not thought it was injuring her," said Laura.

"Does she sleep well nights?"

"I believe I have heard her complain of being wakeful at times."

"Eat her breakfast well?"

"She takes a cup of coffee and slice of toast usually; not always, though."

"Humph!" said the doctor, "I thought so. A red spot on her cheek about all the time."

"She's growing pretty fast, I know," said Laura, thoughtfully.

"She's just at the growing age. If you take my advice, you won't send her to school next summer. Keep her at home a few months; it won't hurt her."

"I always have meant," said Laura, "to give Maude a thorough domestic training, but what with her studies at school and her music at home, I have never thought she had time for it."

"Now is your time," said the doctor. "Light exercise is just what she needs; not too much of one kind, not too long continued, but exercise enough to give her muscles

play, and get the blood down from her brain. She has the headache now every day. Don't take her out of school quite yet, if she wants to finish her term; but insist that she shan't study all the time. Let her set the tea-table and undress the children; and be sure that she has an hour of good air and some kind of light work before breakfast every day. She'll eat a slice of meat after it."

"I believe we are all getting lazy," said Mrs. Darrell, laughing, "Rebecca is so thoughtful and so attentive to all the details of her work."

"H'm," said the doctor, "are you calculating to keep Rebecca always?"

Mrs. Darrell looked up a little curious. There was something in the doctor's tone she did not quite understand.

"Because," he continued, "I know a man that wants to get her. He needs her more than you do. It seems to me that you are strong enough now, so that with a little help from Maude, you could get on with Nancy very well. What do you think?"

"Why, if Reba can do better than to stay here, I shall be very willing; but I shall miss her."

"Now, doctor," interposed Ralph, "that is not fair. Ever since we have kept help at all, we've been worried to death to get good girls; and now that we have got one, and have her wanted, I think the least our friends can do is to let her alone."

The doctor whistled a little.

"Abraham Gladstone's wife is very sick," he said; "if she don't have good care—*good* care," he repeated, "she won't get through the spring. I shouldn't like to see her get a cough in February. It would look bad—look bad. I think Rebecca can do more good there than she can here."

"Oh, if it is a case of sickness," said Mr. Darrell, "that is another thing."

"I will call Reba," said Mrs. Darrell, "and see what she says about it."

A strange feeling came over Rebecca, as she listened to the proposition. She had waited so long for a broader outlook. Was this the answer to her prayer? To attend a sick woman; a woman who, at her best, had been described to her as peculiar and unlovely; who, therefore, when irritated by illness, would be likely to be peevish, fault-finding, hard to please. At first view, she was inclined to shrink. But the inward voice which we all believe in, but all so much neglect, whispered an admonition, and she paused.

"I have deliberately chosen to do a woman's work in the world," she said to herself, "to cultivate womanly excellencies, to achieve womanly triumphs. What fitter scene for all these than the sick room?" She rendered her decision in a most womanly fashion. Looking up to the doctor, who stood, ready to go, waiting only her word; and thinking how true a friend he had been to her, her nature proved its loyalty.

"Shall I go?" she asked.

He felt the confidence implied, and answered in his gentlest tone:

"I think you had better, Rebecca."

The question was settled. It was a good while before Rebecca composed herself to sleep that night. This change, which she foresaw must be followed by others, was a new test of her power of self-dependence.

"I have grown to feel so much at home here," she said to herself. "A woman is, in these material things, a sort of parasite, after all. She grows by what she clings to. She is happy or not, according to whether her conditions are suited to her nature, and that nature is, in a great degree, passive. How shall I find a change to agree with me? This change of all."

It seemed doubtful, but when the word of the Lord came to Moses, saying: "Go, thou and my people," there was no possibility for Israel to stay behind. So, often in our lives we deliberate most over just those courses of conduct which, if we only knew it, are most inevitable. The consolation is, that to Him who controls us, all courses, whether through the wilderness and the stony ground, or through green pastures and by still waters; whether down the dark ravines of error, or over the sun-swept mountains of vision, lead in the end to Him.

XVI.

HEN-PECKED.

Mrs. Gladstone's face, lying upon the heavy pillows of her handsome bed, and encircled by dainty lace-trimmed ruffles, had a pinched and meager look, that was pitiful to behold. She suffered, no doubt; it could not be otherwise; but that was not the worst. It was that she had so little womanly faith, and patience, and fortitude wherewith to bear her suffering. Her life had been spent for herself, and not for others; the gratification of her own desires had been the sole end and aim of her existence. The grand foundation stones of justice, honor, truth and love, were entirely wanting in the basis of her character. Therefore, the weak, unstable fabric which she had reared gaped and tottered, and threatened utter ruin.

Rebecca, looking at her, hearing her feeble moan, watching her suspicious glances, and feeling her utter want of courage, or confidence, or trust, said to herself:

"May God forgive me, if it is wrong, but I cannot do otherwise than pray the Pharisee's prayer, 'I thank God I am not like this woman.' Welcome suffering, welcome disgrace, welcome wearing labor for my daily bread, but never let me experience such spiritual poverty, such utter dearth of all tenderness and faith."

The two women were not unlike, in some of their characteristics. They were both delicate in their instincts, refined in their tastes; they had, neither of them, the strength or the confidence for great undertakings, for anything akin to masculine enterprises; they both felt more than most, even of women, the very womanly need of being cared for, and placed in a secure position, above the sordid, selfish clashing of that material life in which

men are the proper and principal actors. But there was a broad, deep, underlying distinction between them. The one had a clear, far-reaching, spiritual intuition and trust, the other was scarcely at all conscious of spiritual light or insight. Spiritually, she was as feeble and purblind as a nine-days-old kitten. The one was all alive, and thrilling with tenderness and pure womanly affection; the other was emotionally as withered and dry as a husk. The one had been, all her life, the sport and toy of suffering; the other had made her whole life a constant exaction upon others, and had gained a certain sort of ease and luxury in that way. With spiritual culture, as with material, it is the deep subsoiling, and not the mere surface-scratching, which produces rich results.

As the days passed, Mrs. Gladstone's condition became less and less encouraging.

"If there was anything to build on," said the doctor, "we could do something; but she don't seem to have any constitution. Medicine don't work if there is no reactive power in the system, and that seems to be pretty much her case."

But the reactive power of the system, what is it? Is it flesh, or blood, or bone, or is it the spiritual force which gives to all these their life? Women, as a general thing, have more power of endurance than men; will actually live through more physical suffering, and come out less reduced in the end, because they have deeper faith, and patience, and courage, and love. This woman was an exception, just because she lacked these womanly qualities. Therefore she lay upon her bed, white, passive, helpless; the vital forces slowly spending themselves, and no grand, rousing, noble instincts in her, no thought of husband or children, of good deeds that must be done, of sad souls that needed her ministrations, to turn the tide.

Mrs. Bowditch came in every day to see her. She some-

times brought her knitting, always her snuff box, and the latter, at least, was kept in pretty constant requisition. As she sat by the bedside, a little, dry, withered, yellow woman, with black, bead-like eyes, a tawdry cap, and a shabby, faded gown, that had once been showy, if not elegant, she was the best possible explanation of her daughter's condition, both physical and mental.

"It's a dreadful thing, Melissa, for you to be sick this way. I can't see what Providence means by it. Here's your household left to the care of strangers, and everything going to rack and ruin, I hav'n't the leastest doubt, and you getting no better. I must say, I think it is a very mysterious dispensation."

Melissa moved uneasily in her bed, and moaned.

"Where's Echo?" she asked.

"I sent Hepsey out in the yard with him, to give him a little air. I thought he had been mewed up here with you long enough. Hepsey'll be careful of him, for I told her if she wasn't, I'd punish her."

"What is Rebecca doing?"

"Oh! she's seeing to the ironing. Do you know, I don't like her ways a bit. She hasn't folded the clothes anyways as I should, and I told her so. The pillow cases never'll be done up to suit you."

Melissa groaned feebly, almost inaudibly, and turned her face to the wall.

"And what do you think," the old lady went on, "when she was out there this morning, tending to your breakfast, I heard her telling Hepsey a story. Think of that! 'Twas a fairy story, or something of that kind. They're thicker'n hops, now, and by the time you get about the house again, things will be to a pretty pass. Why, how red your cheeks are. Ain't you getting a fever?"

At this instant Rebecca came in from the kitchen. Her quick eye noticed at once the change in the patient.

"I am afraid," she said, gently, "that you have been talking too much. Perhaps she had better be left alone for a little while, Mrs. Bowditch, as the doctor was very particular about her being kept quiet. I will bathe her head, and then I think she will, maybe, be able to sleep."

There was something in Rebecca's mild, but firm way of speaking, that inspired respect; and Mrs. Bowditch, with no further demonstration than a slight toss of the head, withdrew to the sitting-room. Hitherto Rebecca's presence had insensibly produced a very quieting effect upon Mrs. Gladstone's nerves, but to-day the spell seemed to have departed. The more she tried to soothe and make her comfortable, the more uneasy the patient seemed to grow; till at length she refrained from effort, and arranging the curtains so as to deepen the shadows of the already darkened room, she went out.

When Mr. Gladstone came in from the office, and opened the door softly, he found that she was still awake, and approached the bed to speak to her.

Whatever of coldness or impatience Abraham might have felt toward his wife at various times had vanished, now that she lay helpless and suffering before him. With all the delicacy, and tenderness, and susceptibility to injury or shock, which inhere in true conjugal love, there is also a tenacity, an indestructibility of fiber, which of itself furnishes a stronger argument than any array of social facts and statistics against license, in the matter of annulling the marriage bond. His wife was the love of his youth. About her all the rosy sentiment and the airy aspirations of his early days had clustered. In all the trials of his manhood, she had been—in a poor, meager way, it is true, but still she had been—a sharer. If, in the wear and tear of life, some portions of the tender romance, or even of the manly respect which he had cherished, had worn away, there was still left an early memory that was

very potent. It might slumber while she was well and active, and walked on her way beside him, not apparently needing so much of him, as he of her; but now that she was ill and helpless, and so sad and hopeless, too, there seemed an awakening of the old tenderness; and he loved her as he had not been conscious of doing in all the years of her health and buoyancy.

"Melissa," he said, stooping to kiss her, "how do you feel to-day?"

"No better, I'm afraid," she said.

"Why, you even seem worse, I think. Has anything happened?"

"Not much. I wish, Abraham, you'd count the spoons to-day, and see that there's none missing."

"Oh! you needn't be troubled about that, dear. Rebecca is very faithful. I'm sure nobody could do better than she does, except, of course, yourself. I hope it will not be many weeks till you can take her place; but till then I'm sure you needn't have a thought about the house."

"You've seen very little of her yet."

"But then Mrs. Darrell recommended her very highly."

"She hadn't the chance there that she has here."

"Well, dear, I'll count the silver, and I'll do everything I can to see that things go on right, only don't you fret. It is worse for you than anything else."

She turned her face to the wall, and closed her eyes. He sat by her, fanning her gently, and thinking—what? Who knows what a man thinks, when he patiently tries to love what is not lovely; when he strives to embrace a shadow; to take to his heart of hearts a vapor? Yet, in this case, the persistence had about it something that was infinitely tender and touching.

Abraham went out into the kitchen after dinner, and said to Reba:

"Rebecca, Mrs. Gladstone, like any good housekeeper, —and she always was a good housekeeper, you can see that yourself—gets nervous about the way things are going. Hepsey is careless; girls of her age all are, and it isn't exactly your place to see to things—at least, you can hardly be expected to do everything; and would you mind if I looked over the silver basket, just to set her mind easy. I assure you I don't care a straw about it myself."

Rebecca felt that he was sincere in what he said, and yielded with alacrity. She was a little puzzled about Mr. Gladstone. Mrs. Gladstone, indeed, was a very dark riddle to her. Day by day, as she settled some one thing in regard to her, the experience of the next day unsettled it. If a three thousand year old mummy should come to life in this nineteenth century, in the midst of one of our highly civilized homes, it might be a good while before—indeed, it is doubtful if ever, the inmates of that home would come to an exact understanding of the soul thus revealed. Just so dark, so mysterious, so utterly removed from the plane of her own experience or sympathy, did Mrs. Gladstone seem to Rebecca. But Mr. Gladstone. That was another matter.

He was a handsome man, to begin with; a most powerful and manly looking man, with a frank, open face, a pleasant, smiling eye, a chivalrous demeanor; he had, evidently, good natural abilities and more than average cultivation. And yet, dark mystery that it was how such a thing could be, it seemed to her to grow, day by day, more certain that he was—that baleful thing—a hen-pecked husband.

Here and now I make a stand in favor of hen-pecked husbands, and aver that the number of them is greater than the world supposes. I insist that the man who is hen-pecked, is usually so because of some tender, loyal,

chivalrous trait; some faint, spiritual insight, by which he recognizes the dignity of the ideal woman, and will by no means, in ever so gentle a way, lay violent hands on its weakest representative. Such men, under favorable circumstances, make the noblest and truest of husbands. Therefore, I say that the woman who aspires to usurp noticeable and unseemly authority over her husband, wounds not the honor of the male sex so deeply as that of her own, and ought always and everywhere to be held, by women especially, in righteous abomination.

In Mr. Gladstone, Rebecca saw the noblest and manliest qualities; yet, seeing also this other fact of how he was led by the nose by this weak, shrewish wife of his, she contracted a very stiff little prejudice against him.

"I suppose," she thought to herself, "he will be delving among the pots and kettles every day of his life, and there will be no peace in the kitchen, unless all my lady's whims are duly observed there. Very well, if he is used to that system, I am not; and it is just possible that there may be a collision some day."

But it was not about the pots and kettles that the collision came.

Mrs. Gladstone feeling in the humor for sleep one morning during the hour of Mrs. Bowditch's regular visitation, that lady took her knitting-work into the kitchen, where Rebecca was attending to the dinner. Mrs. Bowditch was in a sociable mood.

"You never told me," she said to Reba, "where you came from."

"I was born in Pennsylvania," replied Reba, after a little hesitation.

"Was you, now? Why, I've got friends in Pennsylvania, too. But it's a big State. What part of Pennsylvania did you come from?"

"The eastern part."

"Why, that's just where my friends live. Was it near Philadelphia?"

"Rather. Where did you say your friends lived?"

"Oh! I've got 'em all about in those parts. You see, my mother was a Strouse, and my father's name was Hand, and the Strouses and the Hands are all scattered over that country; especially the Strouses. Now, if you can tell me where you lived, it's ten to one but I know somebody in the same town."

"I was born in Pennsylvania, as I said, but my parents moved away from there when I was about two years old."

"Oh-h!" said Mrs. Bowditch, "then you never lived in Pennsylvania."

Heretofore, Mrs. Bowditch had been simply garrulous; from this moment she became inquisitive; if this woman had any secret, it would go hard, but she would have a twist at it. She must go to work cautiously and systematically.

"Where did you come from, when you came here?"

"From New York."

"Have you got friends there?"

Rebecca was getting annoyed, and found it convenient to get away from this unscrupulous inquisition.

"I think, Mrs. Bowditch, you will have to excuse me for a little while. I believe there is nothing here now but what Hepsey can see to, and I have a bit of sewing up stairs, which must be done as I get the opportunity."

So saying, she left the room.

"Humph!" said Mrs. Bowditch, "I understand all that. But she need not think she can get away from me so. No need to worry; there'll be other days."

However, when Mr. Gladstone came in to dinner, Mrs. Bowditch found an opportunity to say to him:

"Abraham, do you know who that woman is, in the kitchen?"

"No," he replied, carelessly, "I'm sure I don't know any more about her than what I see. She seems to be a faithful, efficient woman, of better breeding than most of her class."

"Yes, but who is she? that's the question. Honest folks don't mind telling where they come from."

Mr. Gladstone knew too well the disposition of his mother-in-law, not to be certain that she had been teasing Rebecca with questions; and he had now and then caught a ray from Rebecca's brown eyes which made him certain that she was not a person to be annoyed with entire impunity. Therefore, he only thought, with a smile, that the old lady had met a retort that chagrined her, and so dismissed the matter. But the pertinacity of this kind of woman is something wonderful to behold.

After dinner she went directly to Melissa.

"Mellie," she said, "do you know, I've good reason for thinking this woman you've got is no better than she ought to be. Think of that, and you sick, and Abraham exposed to temptation."

It was just the kind of shot to tell with immense effect upon a woman of Melissa's temperament. At night Abraham was called into the sick room, to endure a severe cross questioning.

Who was this woman—where did she come from—what character had she hitherto borne? To all of which Abraham could only answer that he did not know, and did not like to ask.

"Just set your mind at rest, Melissa," he said. "I'm a better judge of women than your mother, and I'll answer for this one, that she is all right."

Melissa turned her face to the wall, and gave a small groan.

"Well," asked Abraham, a little impatiently, "what am I to do about it?"

Melissa was still silent.

"If the woman is averse to answering questions, I don't want to make a pettifogger of myself, and bore her to death."

Still no answer, and Abraham, in despair, left the room. But when he came back at bedtime, it was no better. Melissa was still speechless, and the air was fragrant with abused innocence. Abraham had formed a little resolution of his own, however, and tried the virtue of silence himself.

The next morning Melissa was decidedly worse. She had a fainting fit, and came out of it only to go into hysterics; and what with fanning her, and bathing her head with cologne, and opening the window for air, and shutting it, for fear of a draught, he did not get to his office at all; by which means some very important business was neglected. It went on much after this fashion for a week. At last Abraham relented a little in his manner. Mrs. Gladstone saw that he was brought to terms, but it required three days more of sinking turns and hysterics, before she judged him to be sufficiently punished for his contumacy.

Rebecca was a silent witness of the whole process.

"Well," she thought to herself, "if men like this kind of women—women who are not strong minded; women who do not talk; who are leaning in their disposition, viny women, clinging to oaks, that is, men, for support—I do not know any good reason why they should not have them. I wish them much joy of them. If I was a man, I think I should quite as lief have a wife that could stand alone."

And then came that deeper, sadder feeling, which every true woman experiences, when she sees ruin of the noblest attributes. Why will men persist in setting the standard of female excellence so low? Why will they keep the whole sex so in leading strings that they cannot rise into their

native proportions, and be the blessing to themselves and to men, which their Creator designed them to be?

The result of this application of Melissa's tendrils to her supporting oak was, that Abraham came out into the sitting-room, one evening, where Rebecca was sewing, and sat down with a look of fixed determination in his face, which, however, he tried to veil with an appearance of indifference.

Rebecca had not ceased to be curious concerning this man, and feeling instinctively that he was of too noble a nature to be a dangerous inquisitor, she put up no arbitrary barriers between them, but strove rather to beguile him into easy and unrestrained conversation. Mr. Gladstone very soon felt himself yielding to her quietly genial influence, but he was not the man to lose sight of his purpose, however difficult her refined and lady-like manner might make his prosecution of it.

"So you don't like Wyndham," he said, in answer to some faint criticism which his questions had drawn forth. "I suppose it is a sharp change from that rolling, easy-going country around Philadelphia. I think some one told me you were from that section of the country."

"Oh!" she said, "I am already a cosmopolite, and view nothing by comparison. Wyndham is to me to-day as if I had lived in it always."

"Pardon me," he said, a little incredulously, "but you seem young to have divested yourself of all local sympathies and attachments."

"When one can look back upon no past," she said, "that is not associated with sadness and sorrow, one divorces one's self easily from recollection."

"Again I must disagree with you," he said. "Afflictions, I think, oftentimes sanctify our memory of places; we go back to past sorrows with more tenderness than to joys that are past."

"Yes, but they must be innocent sorrows; afflictions which we can naturally refer to the will of Heaven, and not to the injustice of men."

He looked at her in silence. She was very young to utter sentiments like these; her face was too pure, too delicately conscientious, to be naturally associated with wrong doing. She seemed too incapable of guile to have provoked injury from any being. "It is some family trouble," he said to himself, "into which I should be a brute to pry." And in the light of this thought, the mandate of the weak woman in the bed-room beyond lost its force.

"I suppose," he said, "that all trouble, even injustice, comes indirectly from Heaven, and must have, in some way, its redeeming quality. At least, I have tried to think so."

"It would make wreck of my religious faith," she said, "to believe that all the wrong-doing of men came within the scope of God's providence toward His children. I could not trust in Him as a righteous God and father, if I thought that he made use of evil in any such way. If He makes the wrath of man to praise him, I think it must be by the utter overthrow and extirpation of wrong-doers."

She manifested more energy than he had ever observed in her before, and there was a thrilling pathos in her tones which came directly from her heart. His consciousness lingered over the words as they were spoken; his memory received them indelibly; the time came, years after, when he would have given half he possessed to have fathomed accurately their full force and meaning. As for Rebecca, the years brought her insight, and set straight many of her distorted notions of God's providence. The very crimes which then moved so deeply and so justly her fiery indignation, she lived to see bearing the fruit which God

had ordained; bread of life to the sufferer, and apples of Sodom to the doer.

When the conversation was concluded, Abraham sat for a few minutes in thought. A soul of no ordinary scope and beauty had been partially revealed to him. Not that this woman was perfect; on the contrary, she was full of tender, womanly weaknesses. He felt himself stronger, and in the way of worldly wisdom, infinitely wiser than she; but there was, nevertheless, a charm of purity, of insight, of heavenly wisdom about her, which transcended him, and which he held in reverence. Should he make himself an inquisitor concerning the evidently painful details of her life. No, not for a kingdom. The truth about her was something which he was as far as possible from suspecting; but if he had known it all, he would have felt not less, but more pity and admiration for her.

He went back to his wife and said: "Melissa, I have asked all the questions that I shall. There is evidently something which the woman wishes to conceal, but I am more than ever satisfied that she is a virtuous and trustworthy person. I think you have only this choice to make: to discharge her at once and no more words about it, or to make up your mind to let her alone. You cannot find any one else that will serve you half as satisfactorily as she does; but it seems to be worth a good deal to you to have your mind at rest, and if you wish I will go and engage Mary Crane at once."

But Melissa did not wish it. She knew very well that she could not get along with Mary Crane. She chose to keep Rebecca, and to vent her spleen and jealousy upon her in every small, irritating, vexatious way that she could. Mr. Gladstone knew it, but he knew also that she was slowly dying, and the fact softened his mind to many of her mental infirmities. To manifest any sympathy for Rebecca, was only to intensify the trials of her position;

and he refrained from doing so, believing that the deep and true respect which he entertained for her, expressed itself most forcibly, under the circumstances, by a wise and firm reticence.

XVII.

FROM JERUSALEM TO JERICHO.

February came, and Mrs. Gladstone did get a cough. Rebecca's position, by this time, had grown almost insupportable. Should she give it up, that was the question. Mr. Gladstone, partly because his wife was jealous, and partly because she was slowly dying before his eyes, and the sight recalled all the tenderness of his youth, and compelled him to be, spite of her caprice and unreasonableness, absorbed utterly in the slow going out of her life, was entirely indifferent to her. But Mrs. Bowditch, with the spider-like industry of a small mind, had set the village alive with talk about this woman, whom nobody knew; who could or would give no account of herself; till every neighbor who happened into the house, every friend who came from afar to visit the dying woman, even the very minister who called to console her last hours, looked askance at Rebecca, and saw in her, or thought they saw, some evil.

The doctor carried a sad face all these days. He had been down to New York in the fall, as was his usual custom. He had not been able to see Mr. Marston, that gentleman being out of town; but certain inquiries which he had made in another direction, made it probable that, whenever he did see him, he might gain the information which he sought. For this reason the doctor, without at all losing his interest in Rebecca, felt impelled by the grave interests at stake to proceed with caution.

This gossip about her, therefore, was doubly painful to him. Rebecca's sad eyes, unconsciously to herself, reproached him each time that he saw her; and he felt a

tender and manly longing to stand by her, and protect her at all and every hazard. Indeed, the greatest comfort of Rebecca's life, at that time, was the daily visit of the doctor; for he never left her without a kind inquiry, or a pitying glance, or a comforting pressure of the hand. Ah! these men who know a woman thoroughly—all her weak points, all her tender susceptibilities—are, of all others, most dangerous to her peace of mind.

But the doctor could, at best, only show his good will. As he said, "people will talk;" and Rebecca, being very human, felt the talk keenly. On the other hand, what was duty? Mrs. Gladstone was dying. She suffered a great deal every day and every hour; she needed kind and faithful nursing—knew that she needed it; knew that there was no one within her reach who could supply Rebecca's place, and, in some silent, dumb way, she expressed this dependence, even while she was jealous of the object of it. It seems very strange the hold these weak, helpless natures have upon nobler ones. I know of no way of accounting for it, except by referring it to nature's care for her feeblest works; but so it was, that Mrs. Gladstone's helpless clinging was a cord strong enough to bind Rebecca, as it bound her husband, to the most unreasoning docility. She bore, out of pity, not unmixed with contempt, what she would never have borne from one she felt to be her equal.

Again and again Mrs. Darrell offered her the refuge of her old place with her; again and again she refused it. "They may abuse me, if they like," she said, "but they need me, and I shall stay as long as I can do them any good. One thing, however, you can do for me. If you hear of any good place which you think I can fill, secure it for me against the time I shall need it." And Mrs. Darrell promised.

The winter wore away, and spring came. March, at

least, which wears a name it never truly won. Mrs. Gladstone had been sinking very fast in what is called "a decline;" a sort of rapid consumption. It was doubtful now if she would not go out before the first violets came in.

One windy March day her pastor came; for, recently, since the spiritual world had seemed to be so swiftly bearing down upon her, the feeble soul had put forth some faint feelers toward it, and cherished a trembling hope which stretched out into the great Hereafter. He conversed with her solemnly and tenderly, prayed with her, and finally left her.

After he had gone, her husband sat by her bedside, fanning her.

"Abraham," she said faintly—her voice was almost a whisper now—"there is one thing more I would like to speak about. What will become of my things—my dresses?"

"I shall do whatever you direct with them," said Mr. Gladstone.

"I don't care so much for any of them but my blue silk with the flounce. I *should* like to know who is going to have that. I never wore it but once, you know."

"Whom would you like to have it?"

"I don't know. I'll think about it."

She had no sister, no daughter, no friend. Her mother was in mourning. Who, indeed, should inherit that darling treasure?

It was, perhaps, a week later. She had wasted rapidly; it was very evident that the end was near. All day she had been watched, lest her life should go out unknown to them, and now it was far into the night. There had been nothing more said about the blue silk dress, and Abraham, thinking over all the last things that ought to be said, was some way reminded of it.

"Melissa," he said, "you have never told me what you wanted done with your blue silk dress."

She gave no answer but a feeble moan, and turned her face to the wall—for the last time. A half hour later, a slight tremor ran over her frame, and before they could raise her head, the spirit had departed.

I think God's angels caught up that soul out of the great dark into which it was exhaled, and bore it with trembling pity into the Eternal Presence. She had lived through the earth-life, but had gathered so few of its blessings. She had dwelt in the regions of blindness and selfish bewilderment, and had never known the finer air and purer light of that upper country, where love and right-doing make, even on earth, so cheerful a Beulah. Tenderness, bountifulness, aspiration, faith, what were they but words to her. Ah! surely for such souls as these, more than for earth's stricken ones, do the angels drop pitying tears.

When she was gone, a great sense of freedom swept through the house. Abraham felt it, almost before she was buried. He could but feel it. For five years that woman's feeble whims and unreasonable caprices had made themselves the law of his life. For all that he had done for her, what had he received in return? Very little of love or tenderness; nothing of counsel, or sympathy, or support. She had kept his house neatly, and had given him, during years when he most needed the help of a good and true wife, the savor, not the substance of a home. For so much as he had received, he was truly thankful; and he looked down into her open grave with a great heart-pang, and eyes that were wet with honest tears. But when he came home, the sunshine was as clear as ever to his eyes; and the tuneful robin that piped her quaint "cheer up! cheer up!" from the leafless branch of an apple tree by the wayside, woke an answering echo in his heart. His sorrow was not inconsolable.

Rebecca, too, felt the gladness of release. When the funeral was over, the house was shut up. Abraham went to the hotel to board, and Rebecca returned to Mrs. Darrell's. There again she met the great question of what to do?

Mrs. Darrell said, "stay with us;" but Rebecca said, "no, you do not need me, and I will not, so long as I can help it, sink into the position of a useless dependent."

And Rebecca was right. Such a person is like the sink in a kitchen, the drain of much of the family decadence and refuse. To be sure, the sink, if ill kept, has a revenge: it smells. But that is pleasant to no one; least of all, one would think, to the sink.

Mr. Darrell said: "Come down to the office and I'll make a clerk of you."

But Rebecca thought that would be a poor way to stop gossiping tongues. It was a hard thing for her to stand before these dear friends, to feel herself the butt of so many railing accusations, and yet have no word to say in self-defense. To Mrs. Darrell, in private, she did say:

"My dear, kind friend, if, looking back over my life, I saw anything to blush for; anything to make me, in the eyes of God and his angels, unfit to be the companion of yourself and your daughters, I should not be here."

And Mrs. Darrell replied: "My dear girl, I am assured of it. If ever the time comes that you feel free to speak, I shall be glad to hear; till then, let us both keep silence. Silence is often a better test of friendship than many words."

But outside of that family of Greathearts, it is doubtful if any one of the many who had witnessed the steadiness and excellence of Rebecca's life, could quite forgive her this silence; and many who should have been more tender,

railed openly. It was an experience which was calculated to test her faith and patience. But she thought of her vision of the worlds, and said:

"I must wait till other lives shape themselves to the crises of mine. My time has not yet come;" and to tell the truth, it seemed to be quite in the dark, whether it ever would come. But she said to Mrs. Darrell:

"I must go away from here. This town is no place for me just now."

Whereupon the doctor brought forth a suggestion.

"Laura, Jerry Linscott wants to get somebody to take care of his little girl—a sort of half nurse-maid, half governess. I don't think much of governessing, as a general thing, but this isn't a common case. It's as like as not he'd be glad to get Rebecca, if he knew of her."

"The very thing," said Laura. "Mr. Linscott, you know, Reba, has a little girl who is a cripple. It is a very painful case, and, as he is a widower, he feels the care of her very much. His mother keeps house for him, but she is quite infirm, and heretofore they hav'n't been able to get just the person they wanted, to take care of Minnie. I will write him to-morrow. He is a person of a great deal of independence; and, with the recommendation I shall give you, would take you in the teeth of an army of gossips. You will have just about a week to rest, and then you will be quite ready to go. I wonder why everybody cannot have Milton's ready good sense."

The doctor was laughing to himself, bowed over in his chair, till his elbow rested on his knee. Rebecca waited patiently for an explanation.

"Jerry Linscott," said the doctor, who had not, as a general thing, any very great reverence for the clergy; "Jerry Linscott is a—pret-ty—stiff—man to get along with; but I think you'll suit him. I never heard him pray

in my life, that I didn't think of Burns' Holy Willie, before he got through :

“ ‘ Yet I am here a chosen sample,
To show thy grace is great and ample,
I'm here a pillar in thy temple,
Strong as a rock,
A guide, a buckler, an example
To all thy flock.’ ”

The doctor repeated the lines slowly, with great unction. Then he continued :

“ *His* house, *his* family, *his* church, *his* congregation, and, for all I know, *his* graveyard, are all *the best* that could be. He has made his people believe it, too ; and, if he takes a notion to you, as I think he will, there isn't a ram in all Jericho will dare shake his horns at you. But he's a widower, Rebecca ; he's—a—widower. You'd better look out for him.”

The doctor had not said all that was in his mind, but he rose to go.

In due course of time it was settled that Rebecca should go to Jericho. The place lay in a quiet dip of the hills, away from the railroad, but was, nevertheless, for peaceful and pastoral beauty, as pretty as one could wish. As the doctor had intimated, Mr. Linscott was an oracle among his people, and well he might be. To begin with, he was a man of family and consideration, and had a handsome little property of his own, which eked out the small salary the parish paid, in a very acceptable manner. Then, he was a thrifty and energetic man. He attended to the church business with the most praiseworthy zeal and judgment ; in fact, almost entirely relieving the deacons of their responsibility, till the simile for the height of inactivity in the country about was : “ As lazy as the deacons in Jericho.” But, then, the work was always so well done that nobody found fault. The church finances were always prosperous ; the church poor were always well fed and clothed ; indeed,

to be a poor woman, and a member of Mr. Linscott's church, was synonymous with having the cosiest situation and the best pay which the town afforded. The church repairs were attended to at exactly the right moment. Whatever needed zeal and activity was sure not to go begging in Jericho. As for Mr. Linscott's sermons, they were staunch and sound—a little Calvinistic perhaps, a little too bracing for some of the faint hearted and weak kneed among his congregation; but, nevertheless, consisting of the very bones and marrow of orthodoxy, and giving small comfort to heretics or unbelievers.

A man of this stamp could not fail to be delighted with Rebecca's faithful and energetic performance of her duties; and old Mrs. Linscott, being a little infirm, albeit she had spirit enough left to delight in her son's constant success—for he was bone of her bone, and flesh of her flesh, where work was concerned—it soon came to pass that Rebecca not only had almost entire charge of Minnie, but of the household also.

It was a pretty house, a little trim and smart looking, with its fresh coat of paint each spring, and its dark, stately evergreens, in the front yard; but there was a well-kept garden, with a honeysuckle arbor at the back of it; and, beyond, the meadow sloped down to Still river, running in and out among its beeches.

On the whole, it was a pleasant home, and Rebecca's life there was a smooth and grateful contrast to her late experiences. Minnie proved a tractable enough child; and, though her suffering made her a great care, Rebecca was womanly enough to be, on that account, all the more deeply interested in her.

In this quiet sphere of usefulness, Rebecca passed three years; years which it suits the purpose of our story to pass over lightly. Coming to Jericho recommended by Mrs. Darrell, and under the auspices of Mr. Linscott, she was

everywhere well received; and it soon became possible for her to go back to Wyndham with a good name, which should stand her instead of antecedents; but this she did not choose to do. She had leisure and opportunity for reading and reflection; and though, in her outward life, she made little progress, her resources of character and experience were increasing day by day. With this, for the time being, she was content.

XVIII.

AN EMBARRASSED LOVER.

Soon after Mrs. Gladstone's death, the doctor went to New York—and saw Mr. Marston. When he came back, he had the look of a man who had gotten a blow. If he had made any discoveries concerning Rebecca's history, not another soul in Wyndham was the wiser for it; but, as he rode over the hills, alone with the old gray, he spoke softly to himself:

“It is a strange thing, and stranger ones may yet come of it. Gladstone admires her; he isn't in a marrying mood now, but he will be in a few years. *The time—may come when she will want—just—such—a—friend as the—old—doctor.*”

From that time the doctor grew old. He was still the same skillful practitioner; the same grave, wise, cheerful man; his old genial humor was no way abated, but there was yet an unmistakable look of age about him, which he had never worn before.

But, if the fading of his dream had left a deeper sadness in his heart than any life had hitherto brought him, it had left also a serener outlook upon the future. If this world held little in reserve for him, he had all the more reason to commence the work of transferring his hopes and his affections to that world to come, which already seemed to overshadow him with its glory. The doctor's wisdom evidently embraced the art of growing old gracefully; for now that he really felt age to be upon him, he set about borrowing so much of the immortal grace and beauty of the next life as should make the decadence of this more truly pleasing than its early bloom had been. There was

no cant, no affectation, about this; but a simple and natural living for large ends; a perpetual giving forth of wise sympathies and bountiful endeavors, that touched all his old friends with a new love, and made strangers stand a little abashed in his presence.

Whatever the cloud that had come between them, it shed no coldness, no abatement of respect upon Rebecca. On the contrary, his manner toward her, if a little more reticent than of old, seemed also more pitying, more determinedly helpful. She felt a change in him, yet it was not one which pained her. On the contrary, the new phase appealed more powerfully and insidiously to her sensibilities than the old. She had made frequent visits to Wyndham, during those three years at Mr. Linscott's, and always the friend who seemed to be in an unspeakable way nearest to her, and tenderest to her, was the doctor. Certainly, if she had a favor to ask, she was sure to take it to no other.

In this very spirit she had said to him once, after a visit to Mrs. Moss, during which a fresh batch of troubles, between Theodore and his father, had been poured into her ear:

"Doctor, I do wish you would do something for Theodore Moss; he is a reckless fellow, now; but I think one-half of it is owing to his unfortunate position at home. I promised his mother once that I would do him a good turn if ever I could, and I think the time has come now when he really needs it."

They were sitting on the doorstep of the doctor's house, little Kitty playing about their knees, and the doctor looking from the child's face to Rebecca's, with a puzzled, speculative look, which annoyed her. She was far from suspecting the problem which the doctor was trying to solve; but she was obliged to wait some minutes for his answer.

"Theodore is a — strange — boy," said the doctor. "I don't know as there's anything so very *bad* about him. He's honest — nothing mean about Theodore — but he's headstrong, terribly headstrong. Seems to be cruel, too — torments his younger brothers and sisters *dreadfully*. I ain't certain, yet, how Theodore is coming out. His mother's a pretty fair woman. The father don't amount to much — but the *mother's* a pretty fair woman. For his mother's sake, I hope he will do well."

"I wish he might have something to awaken his ambition," said Rebecca. "I wonder if Mr. Darrell couldn't give him a place somewhere, that would challenge his self-respect a little."

"Ho — ho!" said the doctor; "I don't like to ask favors of Ralph Darrell. He is n't any the more likely to grant 'em, for being my brother-in-law. He could do it, if he chose; but I don't want to ask him."

The doctor mused, and Rebecca thought he had forgotten all about it. But he broke out, finally, on the same subject:

"I hav'n't got the power nor the influence that Ralph Darrell has. I can't do much for Theodore; but, since you've promised to help him, I'll tell you what I'll do. He's fond of horses, and a good rider. How he managed to learn so much about horses I don't know; but he's fond of 'em; and there isn't another boy of eighteen, in these parts, that can beat him on horse-flesh. I want to send my young horse to the fair. I'm going down with him myself. I can't stay all the week; I'd like to, but my business won't let me. I'll take Theodore down with me, and give him the whole charge of the horse, after I come back. If he does well by me, I'll do well by him — and I think he will. That will be a start for him. When he comes back, maybe something else will turn up. Can't tell — must wait and see."

Rebecca was well pleased, and immediately found an opportunity of giving Theodore a hint of good fortune in store for him, and an admonition to do his best.

Theodore went to the State Fair, and by good management succeeded in getting a handsome premium awarded to the horse. Coming back to Wyndham, he was quite a hero. The doctor bragged about his horse a good deal, in a quiet way, and never omitted to give Theodore his full share of praise.

In regard to pay, too, the doctor was liberal.

"There, Theodore," he said, counting out the bills with most methodical slowness and exactness. "There is twenty-five dollars. I don't know what you'll do with it—I don't know what you'll do with it—but I—hope—you'll make good use of it. It seems to me you might about as well put it in the bank as anywhere. Why *can't* you put it in the savings bank, Theodore?"

"I shall do better than that with it, doctor," said Theodore; "and you'll say so, too, when you see what I mean to do."

The doctor did not ask any more questions; but he kept a good look-out for Theodore. One day, as he was driving past the little brown house of the Mosses, he was surprised to see a mason and a carpenter at work there.

"Ho—ho!" said the doctor. "What's this?—what's this?" and he turned his horse's head toward the gate.

"Whoa! whoa! whoa!" said the doctor, to the old gray, very gently; "w-h-o-a! We may as well stop here, and see what this means."

Moses was flying about, looking important, and Mrs. Moss was busy in the kitchen. The doctor entered, as he oftenest did without knocking.

"Good morning—good morning!" said the doctor, sitting down in the midst of the confusion which reigned, and looking about him quite as if he had a right to look. "Getting your house fixed up, are you, Rachel?"

"Yes, sir," said Mrs. Moss. "I told Theodore he'd better put his money in the Bank, and he said you told him the same thing; but he said I shouldn't never live in this house another winter, without this roof being shingled, now he'd got the money to do it. He's up there at work with the shinglers, as happy as a lark. The house had got pretty well run down, and I got a dreadful cold, last spring, with the rain a-leakin' in. It will be tight enough this winter. Theodore's going to have it fixed up snug, I tell ye."

Mrs. Moss was so proud she could scarcely keep from crying—so womanly proud of having at last a man to take care of her. She stopped, finally, out of breath.

"Well," said the doctor, "Theodore hasn't made a bad use of his money. It's a good sign, when a boy looks out for his mother—a *good sign*. Good morning."

It was not a week after that, before Ralph Darrell was brought to think that Theodore was a good lad to have about a store, and the youth himself was duly installed as clerk.

"That is the bottom round of the ladder," said Theodore to himself. "Maude Darrell's brown eyes shine away up at the top." But he never said these words aloud, not even to his mother.

Not many days later, the doctor took another enterprise in hand, which he had had on his mind for a good while.

One sunny afternoon he found the carriage-house doors wide open, and Joel sitting astride a low bench in the warm sunshine, oiling the harnesses. The doctor saw his opportunity for a little chat with Joel, about his matrimonial prospects. He liked a bit of work in his hand, almost as well as a woman, particularly if he had anything to say. So he sat down upon a convenient box, took a piece of flannel and a riding bridle, and began to rub.

"Joel," said he, holding the throat-latch up to the sun, to see how the work prospered; "Joel, it is time you was getting married. You ain't a boy any longer; your hair is getting gray. It is time—you was—getting—married."

"Same to you, sir," said Joel, with a pleased giggle.

The doctor looked very grave.

"It is different with me," said the doctor. "I've got a family on my hands already. If Joanna had been a well woman, and had married, as other girls do, I might have thought about marrying, too. But that is neither here nor there, Joel. You ought to marry, and I don't see why you don't."

"Lord, doctor," said Joel, looking foolish, but at the same time pleased. "I don't know as there's a woman anywhere round 'twould have me."

"There's nothing like trying, Joel. It's coming cold weather now; just the time to get married. If I was in your place, I'd get a wife. Lucretia Pepper is a good woman. Why—don't—you—marry—Lucretia?"

Joel simpered a little, and replied:

"Should, ef 'twant for Nancy."

"Well, Nancy's a good woman, too. Why don't you marry Nancy?"

Should, ef it 'twant for Creeshy."

"H'm! h'm!" said the doctor, looking very grave, unless a twinkle about his eyes might be supposed to denote a trifle of humor; and squinting at a martingale as if all his mind was intent upon giving that martingale exactly the proper degree of lubrication. "H'm! Which—one—do you—*like—best*—Joel?"

"Hi! don't care so very particular for ary of 'em."

"I guess you do, Joel—I guess you do; only you don't know how to choose. Which one of 'em do you like to *kiss* best?"

"Oh! Lord, doctor!" with innocent affright. "I never kissed ary one on 'em. I shouldn't darst to."

"Shouldn't dare to;" (the downward inflection, not the upward.) "Why not?"

"Oh!" they might get mad, you know, and tell on't. 'Twouldn't sound well for a man of my age to be kissing a woman."

"Well, I don't know," said the doctor. They're both Christian women. I guess they wouldn't tell. If I was in your place, I'd try it. It might help you to choose. I think it's time you made a choice. I don't think it's right to leave them in uncertainty much longer. If I was in your place, I'd try to make a choice."

Joel thought about it while he was rubbing the entire length of a trace, and finally communicated the result of his reflections in two words:

"I WILL."

The doctor departed well pleased. Two or three weeks passed, and there was nothing further said upon the subject. But one day, as the doctor and Joel were getting in some garden vegetables together, Joel returned to the matter. He was evidently in a good humor, and the doctor suspected, by the twinkle of his eyes, what he would say, before he opened his mouth.

"Well, doctor," said he, "I've done it."

"Done it—done it," said the doctor, gravely. "Done what?"

"Kissed 'em."

"Oh! Lucretia and Nancy. Kissed 'em both. Well?"

"Nancy, she kind o' snickered, and says she: 'La! Joel; be you a fool?' but she looked as if she kind o' liked it."

"How did Lucretia take it?"

"Hi! she just give me a good smart box on the ear, and sent me out o' the kitchen. I tell ye she's *smart*, she is."

That box on the ear, or something else, seemed to have cleared Joel's vision wonderfully. The doctor saw it, but took his own way to bring Joel to confession.

"So, so," he said, "I—suppose—you like—Nancy's—way—best."

"Why, doctor, should you?" asked Joel, in some wonder.

"H'm!" said the doctor, "I don't know. I should be afraid, if Lucretia boxed your ears, that she might not be very favorable to marriage."

"Oh! Lord, doctor; Creeshy came raound arterwards. I wa'n't a grain afeard, never, but what she'd come raound."

Oh! you wa'n't!" said the doctor. "What did Lucretia say, when she came round?"

"You see, I told her 't I wanted to marry her. 'Twas coming cold weather, and all that, just as you said. At first she said she couldn't, 'cause she couldn't never think o' leavin' Mis' Gaines without help; but I told her I didn't expect her to leave; no such thing. I wa'n't so unreasonable. She could jest stay right along, and I'd stay, too, and it wouldn't make no difference to nobody but ourselves. And then I kind o' coaxed her, and told her she must, and she said, well, then, if she must, she must, she s'posed; so that was all about it."

"Ho—ho—ho," said the doctor, meditatively. "Lucretia has got a good deal of temper, Joel. Do you expect to be able always to control her?"

"La! doctor," said Joel. "Some folks are afraid of a woman, if she's got the least grain of pluck about her; but I tell you, doctor, I'd as lives drive a blind mare, that was spavined and wind-galled, as to have a wife that hadn't got no kind o' lightnin' in her. I heered a minister preach a sermon once about its being the glory of a man to keep his wife in good subjection; but, Lord, what

chance has a man got to subdue his wife, if she don't never git riled? Them may have the tame ones that likes 'em, but give me the plucky ones."

"That is good — sound — sense — Joel, good sound sense," said the doctor. "I never thought myself that I should like a woman too well, that never took the bit in her teeth. I've seen both kinds of women; a good — many — of both kinds, and I *never did* see a high-strung woman that was so hard to manage as some white-livered things, that didn't look as if butter would melt in their mouths. It — ain't — always — the high-strung ones — that — are — the worst — to manage. You — may depend — on — that — Joel."

"There's my Creeshy," said Joel, putting on the airs of a Benedict already, "she'll blow herself all to flitter strings in five minutes, and then she's as meek as a lamb. Now, it takes longer than that to get me started, so I don't think we're likely to hev a great deal of trouble. The wust on't is, I don't have no chance to go courtin', livin' right in the house so."

"That is bad," said the doctor, sympathizingly, "pretty bad. If I was you, I wouldn't court long. I'd get married."

"Oh, yes, we're goin' to, about Thanksgiving."

"About Thanksgiving. That is a good time," and so the matter was settled.

The doctor walked off with his head bowed down, and a smile lurking around his eyes.

"Lucretia won't abuse Joel," he said to himself. "She won't abuse him. I'll warrant Joel to come out all right. I was a little afraid he might take to Nancy. It seemed to be — about — nip-and-tuck — with 'em, and I was afraid he might take to Nancy, and then he would have got uneasy, and I might have lost him. But it is all right now; Lucretia will keep him straight."

The doctor little thought that while he was managing this affair in a manner so satisfactory to himself, he was also making sure beyond peradventure, the future happiness of a woman whom he loved to serve. But so it was. By such seemingly insignificant links does fate bind together her noblest plans.

During these three years, Ralph Darrell had been steadily prospering in worldly affairs. Still, as of old, his best strength, mental and physical, was given to business, and Laura, grown wiser by experience, no longer made open complaint of ill treatment.

"It is not the way married people ought to live," she said. "This heaping up of wealth by exhausting endeavor, and leaving the tenderest and noblest faculties of the mind and heart to rust with disuse, is a sin and a shame, which I will never cease to protest against. But common sense teaches us that, in this life, marriage, like all other institutions which depend upon our imperfect human nature for development, must necessarily fall below our ideal standard of perfection. And while this fact does not in the least excuse us from striving therein for a nearer and nearer approach to that standard, it does emphatically condemn that growing restlessness in marriage bonds which seems to be the curse attendant upon the dissemination of free thought in these matters. It is true, now as of old, that what God hath joined together, it is for no man to put asunder; and not Ralph Darrell himself, so long as he fulfills, in any way, the terms of the marriage contract, shall divorce my love from him. If he is tempted, it is for me to be his better angel, and rob the tempter of whatever force I may."

And so she labored, year after year, to make the air of home pure, and genial, and exhilarating; to throw around her husband every tie and every influence which should counteract the tendency of his nature to worldliness and

materiality, and win him to the nobler and purer uses of life. And, year by year, she did gain ground, little by little, though he himself scarcely knew it. Things spiritual grew to him to have a deeper meaning, and he revered them more and more, because they were so beautifully embodied in his wife's pure life.

This house, during all these three years, had been a home to Rebecca, to which she was always welcomed with joy, and which she always left with regret. She kept her interest in, and love for, the children, and watched over their growing development with the fondness of an older sister. One winter evening, during a visit there, Mr. and Mrs. Darrell both went out for a call; leaving Rebecca with the children in the parlor, assisting Maude with her Latin, and overlooking Evelyn's drawing. Presently Mr. Gladstone came in.

"Am I intruding, Miss Maude?" he asked. "The servant told me that your mamma was not at home, so I came in to see you and Eva."

Maude rose with a blush and gave him welcome, and then he gravely greeted Rebecca. It was the first time they had met since she had left his house, and there was a trifle of embarrassment on the part of both.

"Don't let me interrupt your employments," he said, taking up the book which Maude had laid down. "What, reading Virgil?"

"Yes, Miss Reba is so kind as to assist me with my lesson. I am not so brilliant at Latin as my mother's daughter ought to be."

Mr. Gladstone made some gallant reply, his thoughts, meantime, preoccupied with this strange and perpetually recurring enigma of a child's nurse, who read Virgil, and had the manners of a lady. A little of that curiosity, which is inseparable from the masculine organization, where a woman of unknown antecedents is concerned,

broke out in Mr. Gladstone. He had not forgotten his encounter with her of old, and did not mean to renew it; but in a quiet way he began to make advances toward a farther acquaintance.

"You are fond of the classics, Miss March?" he asked.

"Yes, rather, though my knowledge of them is now a thing of the past.

"The literature of the day is so voluminous that one finds little time to go back to the stateliness of antiquity. How very solid and substantial things seem to have been in those old days. So little of the stir and ferment of our times about them."

"Yet, the last days of the empire, the breaking down of the old civilization, and the making ready for the new, must have engendered elements of discord quite as restless and fierce as any strife of to-day. I think it is remoteness in time which gives to those days their appearance of grand statuesque calm."

Mr. Gladstone eyed the speaker closely, a smile lingering about the corners of his mouth. It was a new thing for him to hear a refined and delicate woman express herself in this wise. A learned woman was something which he had always hitherto held rather in contempt; not because of the learning, but because, in his mind, the idea was associated with a masculine want of refinement and delicacy. Mr. Gladstone was too true a man not to feel instinctively that the attributes of womanhood form a crown of distinction with which no intellectual laurels can vie. But a delicate, womanly being, who could yet offer to a man intellectual companionship, might not be so undesirable a character.

"Her learning is probably shallow," he thought. "Women are not naturally intellectual beings. It is, on the whole, a blessing that they are not; but the worst that can befall, is when one of them takes to herself airs of

pedantry, and either utters sounding platitudes and commonplaces, or betrays herself into blunders at every step."

He went on talking with Rebecca, but, instead of verifying his mental predictions, she proved herself original, piquant, sincere. Her talk was so unlike that of any man, that he was forced to admit that it was thoroughly womanly; yet she betrayed an intuitive perception, and a quick, inventive genius, that quite removed from her the charge of superficiality.

"Miss Maude," he said at length, Rebecca having left the room for a moment, "I esteem you very fortunate in having so wise a helper in your studies. I am quite amazed that your mamma does not secure her at once as your governess."

"Oh! we should all be delighted with such an arrangement," said Maude, "but Rebecca will not be a governess."

"Indeed! why not?" said Mr. Gladstone, feeling a deepening curiosity concerning this strange specimen of her sex.

"I hardly know her reasons," said Maude; "but I have heard her say, that so long as the profession of teaching was so crowded, she would prefer doing something for which there were fewer competitors. Rebecca has such odd, conscientious ways," added Maude; "but mamma respects her very highly."

"Verily," thought Mr. Gladstone, as he left the house, "as in the days of Paul, the world is being turned upside down. If, to us politicians and outside lookers-on, it sometimes seems quite akin to the seething 'bubble, bubble, toil and trouble,' of Macbeth's witches, it is certainly a good omen when the confusion of the times turns out such a charming, perplexing, fascinating little enigma as Miss Rebecca March."

And then his thought slipped away from this half hour of healthful recreation which he had just enjoyed, and

took up again the knotty problems of his daily life; put on the strong harness of labor, and till midnight wrought valiantly at its year long task of winning a safe vantage-ground for the soul, its master.

As for Rebecca, while she recognized the innate nobility of the man, she said to herself:

“He has no true idea of a woman’s worth and dignity. How should he have, indeed, having lived so long with that strangely weak creature, his wife? Still, I do not like to talk to him; I am thankful that our ways in life do not lie near each other. I feel out of sympathy with him, and am always disturbed by meeting him. And yet, somehow, he is not an ordinary man.”

XIX.

A CHAPTER WHICH WEAK-MINDED PEOPLE ARE ADVISED
TO SKIP.

Spring had come about for the third time since Rebecca had gone to Mr. Linscott's, and that gentleman, finding how useful, and, withal, agreeable a member of his family circle she had become, began to think of making the arrangement permanent. At first, the uncertainty enveloping her history had made him look very doubtfully upon any such schemes, if ever, as is not unlikely, the pleasant ray of her brown eye, or the genial warmth of her smile, had smitten persuasively upon his heart. By degrees that feeling had worn off, but another misgiving had beset him.

Rebecca was a great reader. That in itself pleased him; he had been delighted with the industry she had shown in going over his really fine library, and making herself acquainted with the best authors in it. But recently, he had known of her reading other books; not, perhaps, decidedly bad in themselves, but which, according to Mr. Linscott's ideas, no woman could profitably read; books that were strong meat even for men of his own decided faith and well established character. Worse than this, she had dropped remarks now and then which indicated that she had a leaning toward what Mr. Linscott called "strong-mindedness." If there was anything which Mr. Linscott abominated, it was a strong-minded woman. He was fond of saying that he agreed with Paul, exactly, concerning women. They were good, excellent, necessary in their place, but a misery and detestation out of it. They were evidently an after-thought of the Creator; and I believe, that when Mr. Linscott's mind was inflamed by

reading, as he would read, the reports of Woman's Rights conventions, he was ready to assert that they were the one blunder in the whole plan of creation. The idea of endowing a plainly inferior being with such persistent and unreasonable aspirations after equality, was an inconsistency which he could not understand. If Mr. Linscott had been an Ahasuerus he would have needed no princes or governors to have suggested the expulsion of these Vashtis. Forthwith they would have gone down to exceeding deep oblivion.

Oh! women who have to deal with men like these, be wise. Be softly spoken Esthers, and never stroke the royal fur the wrong way. So shall you prosper, and obtain all your desires.

If my unworthy heroine had had an eye to the vacant honors of the household, I sincerely hope she would have been wise enough to have heeded this admonition. But fortunately for my story, which otherwise would have been ignominiously quashed at this present stage of proceeding, she had not. Therefore, though she was aware of the cloud no bigger than a man's hand upon her horizon, she would not compromise her ideas of truth, by any dishonest endeavors to avert it. She did not desire to precipitate herself into any such boiling cauldron as she well knew such a controversy would be; but, if Mr. Linscott had determined upon it, it must come. She could not always practice silence or circumlocution; and when the hour arrived, angels and ministers of grace defend the right, for there would be no cry of quarter on either side.

It was on Sunday afternoon that the trumpet sounded. An agent had preached in the morning, and after dinner had gone his way. The house was still, and Rebecca sat with a book in her hands—Miss Hannah More's Devotions, or something equally innocent—when Mr. Linscott entered

the room. He made some remark concerning the weather, but very soon opened upon the subject nearest his heart:

"Miss March," he said, "sundry small hints, which you have lately dropped, have led me to suspect that you have somehow imbibed dangerous and heretical notions. As a minister of the Gospel, and particularly as your pastor, I feel it my duty to inquire into the matter, and, if I find you in error, as I most sincerely hope I may not, kindly and with all Christian love and tenderness, to set you right."

Rebecca felt her heart sink within her. She had so often heard Mr. Linscott, and men of his caliber, assert that women are not equal to argument, but can only, at the utmost, scold; she knew that a woman's way of stating things, whenever it differs from a man's, though it be equally truthful, is usually greeted with such open disrespect by men, that she shrank from the contest. But duty is duty, and hers, just now, she felt to be to stand her ground, and use, as best she might, such weapons of defense as her Maker had provided her with. Therefore she said:

"Thank you. I am not aware of having departed from the faith of the Bible. If I have, upon proper showing, I shall most gladly return to it. May I ask upon what points your doubts have presented themselves?"

"It is, perhaps, rather a delicate matter to handle, since you may fancy that I am doing despite to your sex, which no man is farther from wishing to do, than I. But the Bible so plainly teaches that the position of woman is secondary, and inferior to that of man, that when I see a lady, whom I respect and admire, leaning toward the new fangled views which some bold, bad women are advancing, concerning the equality of the sexes—views which fly in the face of reason, common sense and religion—to the peril, as I truly believe, of their spiritual welfare, it becomes impossible for me to hold my peace."

"It is useless to fly in the face of reason, common sense, or religion," said Rebecca quietly, "since any claim which not only does not accord with all these, but which, in fact, is not solidly based upon them, cannot for a moment sustain its own weight, much less resist the attacks of its opponents. But let us examine the matter, and find, if we can, what the Bible, and reason, and common sense, do teach concerning it."

"Most gladly; and since we mean to be thorough, we will commence at the creation. Adam was made first, and then Eve."

"The brutes were made first, and then Adam," rejoined Rebecca, quietly.

"Yes," replied Mr. Linscott, "I have heard that argument before. But it seems to be forgotten that Eve's creation was, after all, only supplementary to that of Adam. She was formed from his rib."

"Possibly because the earth was too coarse a substance to be compatible with the finer uses for which she was designed. If there was so little of the material element in her, there must have been a great deal of God's spirit, since of these two are human beings composed."

"Rebecca, this is puerile, childish. If there was more of God's spirit in her, how happened it that she was first to transgress?"

"Because the serpent first tempted her, knowing that, being more spiritual in her nature, she had higher aspirations after heavenly knowledge."

"This is quite contrary to all received teachings. It is true that many commentators allow that woman was created equal with man, though I think that there are passages, in the writings of Paul, which fairly create a doubt upon the subject; but the very language of the curse pronounced upon her makes it evident, that thereafter she was certainly degraded to an inferior rank. 'Thy

desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.' ”

“Man has long ago discovered that the sentence to labor is full of beneficence and wisdom, and I do not believe that a one-sided justice was displayed in this matter. If woman was consigned to the duties of the home, it was for a wise and good purpose, not incompatible with her highest and purest estate. Furthermore, if the curse fell heaviest upon her, which in no wise appears to me, the promise was *solely* to her. If she was first in the transgression, she was, so far as man was concerned, *alone* in the redemption. Only the purer nature of woman was found worthy to co-operate with Divinity, in that great transaction.”

Mr. Linscott began to see the danger of drifting away from his usual soundings into unknown and dangerous seas; and to cast about rather hastily for something old and stable to anchor to.

“Rebecca!” he exclaimed, rather more violently than perhaps he intended, “such perversions of God’s Word are very painful to witness. The Bible is to be understood by comparing different portions of it. You cannot be ignorant that the Mosaic law made several plain discriminations against woman. It accounted her ever the weaker and more infirm portion of the race, both on account of physical and mental inferiority. Moreover, after the building of the Temple, women were not allowed to worship in the sacred portion of it, but were restricted to the outer court.”

“To the law of Moses,” said Reba, “so far as it related to the infirmities of women, if that is the proper term for them, no woman can object, except upon the score of its laxity. As it stands, it is scarcely a sufficient barrier to the lust and rapacity of the men of those times. For the rest, the condition of woman, in the Old Testament world, was certainly,

as a general thing, sufficiently restricted; but I still believe that the Divine intention was protection and not persecution. The woman was sternly commanded and obliged to confine herself to the duties and subserviencies of the home; but in an age when the sister was not always safe from outrage at the hand of the brother; when David, the man after God's own heart, was still gross enough to commit a crime which, in these days, would forever brand a man, and, particularly, a religious teacher, with ignominy, is it unfair to suppose that the worship of men in the house of God would have been distracted and profaned by unholy thoughts, if women had mingled indiscriminately in it? Certainly it was not a time in which woman could safely be a public worker. The leaven of her pure nature must be hidden in the home, till that should be purified, and so the bounds of her sphere be enlarged by a natural necessity.

“Meanwhile, God did not leave the sex without a witness. More than once, when Israel was compassed about with foes, and her men were powerless, by reason of their sin, for its salvation, a woman's hand brought deliverance. If there was a prophet to be saved from the fury of the licentious mob who ruled at the court, it was a woman who concealed and nourished him. If the heart of a heathen king was to be softened, that the sacred nation might be preserved, it was by woman's agency that the deed was accomplished. And so Miriam and Deborah, and the Widow of Zarepath, and the gentle Queen of Persia, kept alive the faith in the nobility and purity of womanhood, till, in the fullness of time, the world should become worthy of her presence, whom the Maker had foretold in the Garden; and the promise, on which the world had hung for four thousand years, should be fulfilled.”

“The close biblical student will, moreover, discover unmistakable indications that the great law of progressive development had already begun to operate in favor of an

amelioration of her condition. For instance, in the dedication of the first temple, there is no mention made of women as participating in the services; but in the account of the second dedication they are prominently mentioned. It is worth noticing, too, that while it was Solomon, the licentious keeper of the largest harem on record, who excluded them, it was Ezra and Nehemiah, holy men and prophets of the Lord, who welcomed them to the scene of the greatest public event of the time."

"But, Reba, you must be aware, in spite of all your ingenious manipulating of received truth, in spite of all the grimaces you make in swallowing what you cannot make way with, that the fact still remains, that in the New Testament as well as in the Old, after the birth of Christ as well as before, the doctrine of the subjection of woman is still a very prominent one. The Apostles, with one accord, assert and maintain it, so that were the Old Testament entirely stricken out of existence, enough would still remain to confound all the Women's Rights Conventions that ever met. Ah, Reba, the truth of God's Word has withstood the stout assaults of infidels and skeptics in all ages—men of strong arms and devilish tempers. It is not likely to fall before the feeble rantings of a few weak, misguided women."

"In your haste, sir, you forget that I, for one, make no assault whatever upon sacred truth. I hold my Christian name, sir, as dear as you do yours. I will yield to no one in zeal for the truth of God's Word; but, since Luther's day, there has been no need for any Christian minister to berate the humblest of his flock for standing fast by the great right of the private interpretation of that Word. The Bible is the same in all ages; but men progress from century to century in the knowledge as well as the love of it. Think of the modifications of Christian belief, which have transpired within the last fifty years even, and then say, if you have the courage, that the plummet of this generation has sounded

the infinite depths of revealed truth. Let us take up the teachings of the Apostles; and in the outset I must beg you to notice this difference between the Law and the Gospel. In the Old Testament the fiat concerning woman is blind, dark, absolute; in the New, it is written all over with light and love and beauty."

Mr. Linscott was unable to see anything infidel or heretical in this statement; he, therefore, contented himself with saying:

"But at least the law is there, and expressed in no measured or doubtful terms. 'Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands.' 'Therefore, as the church is subject unto Christ, let the wives be subject unto their husbands in everything.'"

"There are two propositions concerning the teachings of the Apostles on this subject, which I think can be incontrovertibly established. The first is, that they qualify very essentially the ancient absolute authority of the man over the woman, by referring it to the principle of love, as in the passage you have just quoted, where Paul expressly reminds the husband, that as Christ gained his headship of the church by giving his life for it, so the husband derives his authority from his power and willingness to protect the object of it. Certainly, words could not convey a stronger sense of obligation than that. The second proposition is, that the Apostles, and the early church generally, admitted women as co-workers, in their own sphere, with men, in the work of spreading the faith; subject only to such restrictions as the proprieties of the times demanded. With these two propositions in view, we can hardly do better than to examine the texts which refer to them, in course."

They provided themselves with Bibles, and after a short examination of the passages which relate to the mutual relations of husband and wife, Mr. Linscott was able only faintly to deny that the command to the husband to cherish

the wife, is at least as strongly affirmed as the command to the wife to obey the husband; though, from the fact that men have been mostly the speakers, heretofore, it has never been so strongly insisted upon.

"But," read Mr. Linscott, "'the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.'"

"Man was made to subdue the earth," said Rebecca; "that is, to be a worker among material things. With the strong, coarse fiber necessary to this work, the finest spiritual excellences were incompatible. Yet the earth must not be left without spiritual life and light; therefore, woman was made to be a helpmeet for him; not in subduing the earth, for which office she is most plainly unfit, but in preserving the sacred flames of honor, and truth, and love to the world; and you will please to mark how tenderly, in the succeeding verses, Paul guards against any wrong which his words may seem to do the woman. And this is not an isolated case of such caution. It occurs in every instance, or nearly so, where the subject is mentioned at all. It is my sincere belief, that men have greatly belied the apostles, and especially Paul, in this matter; for the more I study the epistles, the more I see that the writers of them were inspired with views of the female character far, very far, in advance of the prevailing conceptions of their times. Where, in all previous or contemporaneous literature, do you find such pure and noble ideals as those which the apostles held before the women of the Christian Church? To this day, indeed, they stand unrivaled for delicacy, and dignity, and purity. The world was not yet ripe for the complete emancipation of woman; but they recognized very plainly the positive nature of her inspirational gifts, by permitting her to prophesy and pray, and those women who were not wives or mothers, were exhorted to be 'teachers of good things.'

The female diaconate was, moreover, a well established institution, and deaconesses held equal rank with deacons, and, in many instances, gained more than equal renown. The name of the pious, devoted, heroic Olympias, will stand side by side with that of St. Chrysostom, as long as Church history endures."

"Really, Miss Rebecca, your eloquence is so overpowering, that I may mistake, but I think I remember a passage like this, in Corinthians: 'Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but to be under obedience, as also saith the law; and if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands.'"

"'For it is a *shame*,' a disgrace, not a sin, 'for a woman to speak in the church.' In another place is added, to a somewhat similar injunction, '*that the Word of God be not blasphemed.*' I think an impartial reading of his epistles must convince any one that Paul was powerfully influenced by the desire to avoid, as far as possible, giving offense to his heathen neighbors. But the proprieties are not immutable. The world's ideas, concerning the subjection of woman, have already outgrown the use of the veil, and Paul's command, in that matter, is as obsolete as those concerning feet washing and the salutation by kisses."

"You speak of Paul as if he were the sole author of the epistles, and not the medium of Divine revelation."

"On the contrary, I was about to remind you that they were inspired by the same Spirit which rules the world to-day; and which has ordained, that so fast as women are educated they shall become the teachers of the world. If history teaches any one thing, clearly and plainly, it is that this wonderful amelioration of the condition of woman is the direct outgrowth of the Christian religion. In fact, I have again and again heard women exhorted to zeal and gratitude, on this very account, and that from the Jericho pulpit, Mr. Linscott."

“It is no doubt true that Christianity has done much for woman. It has opened many subordinate fields of labor to her, but it nevertheless unfailingly asserts the natural and ineradicable fact of the inequality of the sexes and the inferiority of woman. You seem to forget that fact, which, with all your ingenious quibbling, you have not yet mastered.”

“The inferiority of woman, in a certain sense, is a fact which I do not deny. If you consider a watch inferior, as a piece of mechanism, to a thrashing machine—and it is, in a sense; it utterly lacks the accumulation of physical force which distinguishes the thrashing machine—then I freely confess the inferiority of woman. It is upon this fact, indeed, that I chiefly build. A greater than Paul has said: ‘He that is least among you, the same shall be greatest.’ And it is in the sense here intended that I hold, and will most firmly maintain, the spiritual superiority of woman. Whoever is great spiritually, is usually small in that material sense, which is what most commends itself to the world’s perceptions; witness all great poets and religious teachers. While those who are strong in that lower sense—monarchs, warriors, the kings of finance and of trade—are correspondingly weak in spiritual strength. To this general rule, women are so far from being exceptions, that, as I believe, they form the one great, striking example of it. ‘When I am weak, then am I strong.’”

Mr. Linscott was listening intently, with glittering eye and scornful lip. Rebecca continued:

“If there were anything dark or doubtful in the utterances of the apostles on this subject, and I do not conceive that there is, it would be more than offset by the great cardinal fact, that wherever Christianity goes, it carries with it the seeds of the elevation of woman. The men of to-day are not so much in advance of the men of the old dispensation as the women are, because Christianity has

never had, could never have, such thorough acceptation and deep, personal application at the hands of men, as of women. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned; and spiritual discernment is not so much a masculine as a feminine trait."

Mr. Linscott was a good deal bewildered at the boldness of this logic. Not that it convinced him, or caused him, for a moment, to waver in the old faith which he had taken in with his Westminster catechism, and which the whole tenor of his life had gone to confirm. But he was so much surprised at this unheard-of assumption, in so quiet a person as Rebecca, that he hardly knew how to reply.

"If your views are correct," he said at last, "the Messiah should certainly have come in the person of a woman, not of a man; and women should have been the first propagators of the faith."

"Not at all. When God would redeem mankind, He took upon Himself the form of a man. Had He done no more, the world would still have remained in sin. But He clothed Himself also in the unselfish, sacrificing spirit of woman, and by suffering, not by doing, saved the world; foreshadowing thus the path humanity must tread before it reaches perfection. A woman received the Christ from God, and gave him to the world; women ministered to him, believed in him, wept over him, strengthened him, all his life; were last at the cross and first at the tomb, when men betrayed and crucified him, and his disciples forsook him and fled. When faith became knowledge, to write the record of that life, and to hold it up to the view of the world, was essentially the work of men. And well they managed the rough, rude breasting of popular violence, the downright, stormy assertion and maintenance of truths which had been cradled at Bethlehem, nurtured at Bethany, and at Jerusalem crowned with thorns."

"Reba, the haughty spirit which you manifest is very unbecoming to a woman. The propagators of the faith were taken from among men, because the intellectual power necessary to such an undertaking is entirely impossible to woman. The mind of woman is naturally weak, and utterly incompetent to vast results in any given line. A simple, blind faith I grant to woman, but never intellectual greatness."

"Pardon me, if I object to your way of stating the thing. I do not think, besides, that the facts will bear you out in it. I take it that the intellectual question may be incontrovertibly settled in this way. In physical strength man is undoubtedly the superior of woman, which gives to the manifestations of his intellect a certain force which women will not, and need not wish to rival. But other things being equal, there cannot be a doubt that she will develop as much intellectual capacity as man, to which her predominant emotional and spiritual nature will impart an elevation and fervor, equally unattainable by him."

"I deny your premises, and as a proof that women are not capable of great undertakings, let me remind you, that great affairs in all times have ever owed their origin and development to men. Why, men shape the destinies of the race."

"Aye, but women shape the race. The difference between a man and the sum of all or certain of his ancestors, is exactly expressed by the powers and conditions of his mother, during the period previous to his birth. And from the time he is born, during the most impressible period of his life, he is almost solely in the hands of women. If the making and training of races go for anything, then the work of woman is not to be lightly estimated."

It was growing dark, and Mr. Linscott did not show

signs of desiring to prolong the conversation. As he opened the discussion, however, it devolved upon him to close it.

"Rebecca," he said, "I am greatly disappointed to find you so contumacious. The matter is far worse than I anticipated. I regret this the more, as it may interfere, nay, as I am a Christian minister, must interfere materially with *my intentions* toward you. I beg you to reconsider these views, and, if possible, renounce them."

It was the last fling of a man who felt himself worsted, and gave up with a very bad grace. Therefore, I think Rebecca's answer, if very natural, a little unchristian.

"Mr. Linscott," she said, in those calm, liquid tones, which she could make so musical; "Mr. Linscott, your intentions toward me, as expressed by your deeds, have ever been so kind that they have left me nothing whatever to desire at your hands."

It was quite dark when Mr. Linscott left the room, but, as he went out, Rebecca felt that, by making an honest, earnest stand for what she believed to be truth, she had lost a friend.

XX.

A MOTHERLESS CHILD AND A CHILDLESS MOTHER.

Reba retired to her own room, after her talk with Mr. Linscott, feeling vexed and out of spirits. That gentleman's manner toward her had provoked her to dogmatize in a manner very repugnant to her feelings. She knew, too, that in going over so much ground in so short a space of time, she had been compelled to omit many modifications and illustrations of her thought, which, if she had been permitted to use them, would have smoothed away some apparent roughnesses, and given to the subject a far less bristling and defiant aspect. As it was, she felt sure that she had forever lost her place in Mr. Linscott's esteem and admiration; a thing always unpleasant in itself, and so much the more so, as she had hitherto found her home in Jericho a pleasant one.

"I do not know that I can help it," thought Reba, bitterly; "if, while God has given to woman the strong wing of intuition, He has also ordained that man shall come creeping behind her, on the rickety crutches of a supposed fact and a possible deduction. I would have been glad to be milder with the man, if he would have let me; but I will never be brow-beaten out of my own convictions of truth."

It was not in Reba's way, just then, to reflect upon the wisdom of this provision of nature, by which man, who has the range of the whole wide creation, and has his work therein, should be made dependent upon its facts for knowledge; while woman, who is, for the most part, confined to the narrow limits of home, lifts a clear eye into the heavens, and beholds the principles from which all facts spring.

Mr. Linscott did feel, as Reba clearly saw that he would, aggrieved and almost insulted, that a woman whom he had protected, and who had been for three years an inmate of his house, should have withstood him as Reba had done. That parting shot, too, on the subject of his intentions, had not been without its effect. And, altogether, there was a deep and rankling sense of injury left in his mind, which his manner toward her, during the next week, made very apparent. It was not artfulness which made Rebecca mild and conciliatory toward him, but a sincere desire, so far as could be, to repair the injury which he felt she had done him, even though her own conscience held her blameless. But it was quite useless. The breach, she soon found, was one which could never be built up or bridged over.

She retired to her room, one evening during the week, oppressed with a sense of coming change. She had been all over the ground, again and again, in her own thought; had wondered often at the unseasonableness of men in being willing to sacrifice their own lives for the privilege of free thought, and then denying the right of opinion to woman; had considered deeply whether there was anything left her to do to restore confidence between herself and Mr. Linscott. But she could see nothing. She fell asleep at last—into a deep repose of mind and body, which seemed to be the result of her latest waking thought, that God is over all, and rules His universe of souls as He does His universe of stars; the one as wisely and as surely as the other.

But troubled dreams ere long beset her; dreams of days gone by; of forms and faces she had not seen for years; a child's wailing rang in her ears all night long, and cold, clammy hands, that were still hands which she had passionately kissed, glided over her face. She rose at daylight, with a strong, unutterable yearning in her heart.

"Mr. Linscott," she said, at breakfast, "I want to go to Wyndham, to-day. Have you any objection?"

"Not the least," he said; "I will order the stage to call for you. It starts about nine o'clock."

The day was lovely as the opening spring could make it; a pure air, with the scents of the pine groves blowing through it, a sky like crystal, and the soft, moist earth feeling the warmth of the sunlight, and thrilling into verdure and violets almost before her eyes.

But all these loving influences could not charm the weight from Reba's heart, or dispel the gloom that clouded her eyes. Look where she might, she could only think of the black and bitter past, from which, of late years, she had so resolutely turned her eyes. The old wrongs, and the old renunciations, were all, it seemed to her, to be suffered over again. Push them back, hold them at bay by the force of her will, as best she could, they would rush over her, and for a time she seemed utterly overwhelmed.

"Why did I not die years ago," her soul cried out, "even before I was born, as Job wished he had done."

But at last, just before she reached the village, she leaned her head upon her hand, in utter weariness of the struggle, and gave up to the omnipotent, overruling Power.

"He can 'loose the bands of Orion,'" she said, "and 'guide Arcturus with his sons.' There is nothing in my poor life which is too mighty for Him. 'All His waves and His billows have gone over me,' and yet I live to praise Him—yea, am stronger and richer to-day than when first I felt His chastening hand. He has delivered me out of six troubles, and in the seventh He will not forsake me." And the refrain came to her mind, from those spiritual heights to which we all look in our times of deep distress: "Yea, though I walk through the

Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me."

Then, the day without was not brighter than the day within, and peace, like a river, flowed through her soul.

At the entrance of the village the doctor encountered the stage. He drew up the old gray, and bowed to Rebecca; a deep sadness, it seemed to her, in his eyes and shadowing his face.

"Go right to Joanna," he called to her. "She will be glad to see you. Catherine is very sick."

A pang shot through Rebecca's heart; but she had long ago learned self-control. It was five minutes before the stage halted at the doctor's gate. As she walked up the graveled path her face was very sad, but her step was firm.

It is a short story, and easily told. Four out of five of all the children born, die before they are five years old. But who shall calculate all the agonies compressed in those two lines? The novelist may linger over the bier, strewing flowers of sentiment; with well-feigned tenderness, may touch the quick soul into tears. But when the flowers are all faded, and the tears all shed, the depth of that agony lies unfathomed below. It is not the hopes wasted, or the love poured out in vain, that make that loss irreparable to the mother's heart. Other children may come, and the hopes bloom and the loves twine again. But the spirit and essence of her own life were in the child; the best powers of her soul were blossoming and bearing fruit there. It is her purest, most intimate, farthest-reaching aspiration, which, to mortal eyes, has gone out in blackness of darkness forever. Her life opens out henceforth by that great window which the loss of the child made, into the hollow gulfs of eternity. Blessed for her if, instead of cold and clammy dampness, the pure light of heaven streams in through the breach. When

the stars go out, and the ocean ceases its plaint to the shore, and all finite things fade in the white light of eternity, the mother's soul may be made whole again. Till then she walks bereaved.

Something of all this Joanna and Rebecca felt, as they watched the slow wasting of little Kitty's life. Rebecca held her for hours together in her arms. Looking upon her perfect and strangely mature beauty, she traced in the full black eyes, and wax-like skin, and regular harmonious contour, the perfect reproduction of features which, in her girlish days, had stood to her for all chivalrous and manly attributes. In the dimness and silence of that solemn room, scene after scene of those early days rose before her, and the memory of them pierced her heart afresh. But the hours went on, and with the morning light the spirit fled.

There were others to care for the little body—it was Rebecca's duty to weep with the bereaved Joanna. The stricken heart cried out: "I loved her so! All the forecast of my life centered in her; and now she is taken from me. Her cooing voice will never greet my ears again; her pretty hands will never smooth these poor, wrinkled cheeks. I shall never see the light shine out of those great, deep eyes, that always seemed looking through all things to the life behind and beyond them. Oh! it was nothing to me that I was growing old myself—that my life was wasting and perishing, and losing its freshness and its beauty, while her sweet soul was gathering all the lost bloom and brightness into itself, and growing daily more and more into that ideal of Life which I once so fondly cherished. And now, my little white flower is faded—my little bird of Paradise droops her wings; and I, dead to all love, must still live on."

And Rebecca who once before had found words to comfort, was dumb now, and could only weep in silence with her.

"When we do not know what else God means," said Laura

Darrell, coming in upon them in their grief, "we may always be sure that He means *Love*. Rest on that now; the special purpose will be plainer by and by."

When the old sexton came to the doctor to inquire where little Kitty's grave should be dug, a curious circumstance transpired.

"It kind o' ought to be," said the sexton, "in the corner by the Gladstone lot. There's just about room there for a small grave, betwixt where Miss Joanna'd naturally be laid and the line of the lot. It'll shove the little one up pretty close to old Mrs. Gladstone, though."

"Well," said the old doctor, pensively, "let it be so. They won't quarrel."

The sexton saw only a ghastly joke in the remark; but, as the doctor walked away, he repeated to himself in a tone that was not jocose—"Dust to its kindred dust. The old lady was a good woman; a tender-hearted woman. They—won't—quarrel."

The funeral went by, and still Rebecca lingered in her old home at Mrs. Darrell's. There seemed no strength in her to go back to her accustomed tasks. The whole wrong and misery of her life were forced upon her afresh; her nights were spent in weeping; her days in a hard struggle for outward composure. At length, one midnight, when Mr. Darrell was away from home, she rose from her bed and sought her friend.

"Mrs. Darrell," she said, "once I stood by you in trouble. Will you do as much for me now?"

Laura was awake in an instant, and drew the drooping head to her pillow.

"Lie down here," she said, "and tell me all about it."

For two long hours these women talked together; and as the sad, sad story overflowed from Rebecca's lips, Laura's ardent soul caught fire and blazed with friendly zeal and sympathy.

"You poor, stricken, suffering lamb," she said, "torn by the wolves, and beaten and cast out by the shepherds, and yet, and yet leading a life so much deeper and purer than thousands of more favored ones. Oh! how can God look upon the earth and suffer such things to be. Reba, believe me when I say, that never again while I have a home shall you want for one. Never while I have bread shall you need. And this not only for your individual sake, but for the sake of wronged, abused, down-trodden woman."

During the conversation, the peculiarities of Rebecca's position at Mr. Linscott's came to light, and Laura was confirmed in her impression that the best, and only true thing for Rebecca to do, was to make a change in her employment.

"You know," she said, "I have never been satisfied that you were quite in the way of your duty. What you have told me to-night convinces me that I am quite right. It is very true that woman's *highest* duties are in the home; but that they are *limited* to it, I can by no means concede. Her relations to society and the world, in the present state of civilization, are intimate and far-reaching, and should be of a nature to purify and refine the coarser elements of life beyond any thing which man alone can possibly achieve in that direction. The heathen nations are not suffering for light, as the men of this generation are. Witness the mire of sensuality in which so many of them flounder, to the degradation of their own best powers, and the utter ruin, temporal and, so far as we can see, eternal, of thousands of helpless and otherwise innocent women. I would in no wise fall behind Paul, who has declared that '*charity never faileth.*' But it is very hard to measure one's invective against the deliberate, cold-blooded betrayer of female honor. The most that can be said in extenuation of his crime is, that his fault, after all, is the

fault of the system in which men are educated, in spite of their mothers, too often with their blind sanction, by the pulpit and the press, that is, by each other, namely: that women are the natural and lawful prey of the male sex; the small fry of creation, the perch and minnows made for the express eating of lordly pikes in the shape of men. When men come to understand and know, that the higher and nobler uses for which women were created constitute them the purest and most elevated order of beings the earth affords; when they are made to feel it their duty, always and everywhere, to protect and cherish women, because they are women, the race of seducers will become small by degrees and beautifully less."

"But, Mrs. Darrell, women themselves need a great deal of cultivation, to raise them, as a mass, nearer the true ideal of womanhood."

"Very true; but it can never be done, so long as this false, bad notion of the absolute inferiority of woman exists. That once uprooted, and women taught the self-respect which would naturally ensue from their taking a secure and acknowledged position at the head of society, and of all benevolent and philanthropic effort, instead of being tacked on, as at present, to the tail of such enterprises, while a grandiloquent President and Board of Directors are grouped together to make a figure-head, and generally prove about as useful as that appendage—and the complaints of scandal and extravagance in dress would soon cease. At worst, these are women's only vices, and show of themselves, as compared with the love of alcoholic and narcotic stimulants, and licentiousness, the equally distinguishing vices of men, the relative position of the sexes."

"But, Mrs. Darrell, I am only one woman, and not a very bold or strong one at that. What can I do toward bringing about this result?"

"The work of one, my dear, which is all the best of us can do. But do, I entreat you, let your voice and influence, your whole life, go toward the emancipation of woman."

"Mrs. Darrell, your views are so pronounced, your words so ready, why do you not write on this subject? I am sure you might."

"Ah! Reba, too many women have written already, trite and shallow things, which but confirmed the world in its estimate of woman's incapacity."

"But you are too earnest to say trite and shallow things."

"Many a word, Reba, which seems forcible and earnest in the silence of one's own room, spoken in the ear of the world, becomes either a diminutive whisper, or a feeble squeak. I can but think that, in order to write worthily, one should be able to draw from deeper wells of thought and experience than those sounded by the worldling or the merely ambitious soul. It is to humanity's higher self that the writer properly addresses himself, and I think too well of this pure soul of man, of which the great living, moving world of society and commerce is but the outer shell, to believe that it can ever be thrilled by the words of a common-place or pre-occupied mind. The deepest culture, the strictest discipline, should worthily frame, even God's high commission, before the soul should dare take upon itself to instruct this great living heart."

"And then a woman's book, especially if it be about women, has such an unfair chance. The critics are all men, and, one would judge by what they say of each other, men of very fractious dispositions besides."

"It is true there is a race of critics bred in large towns, their instincts perverted by a knowledge of the world, who look upon every book that is published, every attempt made to elevate the position of woman, in precisely the same

spirit in which a small black and tan terrier looks upon a rat; as a thing to be treated to a good grip, a hard shake, and, if possible, to be left dead on the field. A book must have something more than the ordinary vitality, to run the gauntlet of these, and escape their fangs. But beyond them is a class of noble, intelligent men, loyal to truth and zealous for the world's progress, naturally chivalrous, besides, in heart and bearing, who will give every worthy word a right royal welcome; and of whom no complaint can be made, except that they, too, are a little infected with the idea that not so much ought to be expected from a woman as a man—which is true at present, through the circumstances of her rearing, not from the paucity of her natural endowments—and are, besides, a little inclined to flattery, by which means some mischief has been done in the way of lowering the standard of female achievement. After all, the critics, as critics, have neither the power of life nor death; for God has so made the race, that a true word, well spoken, will command the ear of the world, whether it come from man or woman."

It followed from this conversation, that when Reba went back to Jericho, Mrs. Darrell went with her, and by her means a peaceable separation was effected between Mr. Linscott and Rebecca, and the acrimonious feeling remaining in his mind, a good deal softened.

"Rebecca has, after all, been faithful to her duties," he said, "and has behaved herself in so exemplary a manner, that of all the ladies in Jericho, I know of none more highly respected than she. If she holds some opinions adverse to my own, and as I believe to the truth, I suppose much must be pardoned to the natural weakness of a woman's understanding. God's mercy is infinite, and happily He makes little account of intellectual error if only the heart be right."

Mrs. Darrell swallowed her amusement, and did not so much as allow a twinkle of it to escape at her eyes.

"It is in the grain," she said; "let us waste no time trying to polish it out."

But perhaps she had a little sly revenge in the thought, that even Mr. Linscott was, in his own way, very dependent upon women.

Reba, settled once more in Mrs. Darrell's home, felt herself free from the shackles of the past, as she had never done before. It seemed to her that partly she had won, and partly Providence had given back to her, the right to call her life her own, and to make the most of it. The feeling gave her new strength. Once, when Mr. Darrell had offered her the place of an accountant in his office, with the same salary and privileges that he would give to a man, she had said to him:

"Sir, the dust of your office would soil my robes."

But now circumstances were changed, she herself was changed. She felt herself strong enough to tread firmly and freely the plane of masculine action, and gather therefrom no stain. When, therefore, the offer was for the third time renewed, she accepted it. There was the usual nine days' talk, which was of course to be expected; but when it was found that she continued to remain at Mrs. Darrell's house, and was treated by her, not as an inferior, but as a friend and equal, scandal laid its hand upon its mouth, and was dumb; as indeed I believe it would have been, had she domiciled in the humblest house in the town, so she had gone steadily about her work, with a heart and life pure in the sight of all men.

XXI.

THE INCAPABLES.

Mr. Darrell, entering his office on Saturday morning, suddenly remembered, that, on the following Monday, Rebecca was to commence her duties.

"Humph," he said, looking about him a little uneasily, and seeing dimly, for the first time in his life, that the place was not as neat as a parlor. "Slade, seems to me we look uncommonly dirty here. I guess it's because it is spring, and we hav'n't cleaned house yet, eh?"

Mr. Leslie Slade was the book-keeper; in the parlance of the young ladies of Wyndham, he was a very stylish young man. He sported a well waxed moustache, dressed *a la mode*, carried a small cane, and aspired to be a lady killer. Slade looked about him rather incredulously. The place was not any dirtier to his eyes than usual. The windows always *had* been blurred with dust. He had never known the time when the ledges were quite free from it, and it was certainly years since the cocoa matting on the floor had shown its original color. And Slade, exquisite though he was, sporting his perfumed pocket handkerchief, and wearing immaculate linen, had never seemed to feel the place other than clean.

"The truth is," continued Mr. Darrell, "we are going to have a lady in here, next week; a lady whom I respect very much, and who I expect will be more critical about these things than we have been. Hum! I hardly know, myself, what is the proper thing to be done, but I suppose, if we were to have Peter's wife" (Peter was the porter) "come here, she would know precisely. There's the floor and the windows—well, I guess the truth is, we need a pretty general going over. We'll have to manage so as

to shut up by four or five o'clock, and send her in here. So mind you get your papers out of her way. These women, when they get a cleaning frenzy on, do upset things so."

"Very well, sir," said Slade, "I'll be ready for her." And Mr. Slade's face, that needed nothing but the expression of a noble and upright soul, to make it a handsome one, began already to wear the lady killer smirk.

When Mr. Darrell had provided that the place should be made clean, he felt quite satisfied with himself. That old retort of Reba's, about the dust of his office soiling her robes, had had a literal point to it, which she was far from suspecting. As Mr. Darrell entered the office, on Monday morning, and viewed the success of Jane's labors, he said to himself, mentally:

"This will do for a month to come, at least. She can't complain that her white skirts will suffer here."

Reba, entering a few moments later, cast an eye about her and saw at once that some preparations had been made for her advent. She was wise enough, however, to say nothing, but put away her bonnet and shawl, and took the seat indicated by Mr. Darrell, with an external composure so perfect, that neither of the gentlemen present at all suspected her of any fluttering at heart. Mr. Slade was introduced, and commenced, in his most gallant way, to make the lady's acquaintance, and at the same time to instruct her concerning her new duties. Everything seemed to be working as smoothly as possible.

Yet, in spite of himself, Mr. Darrell felt fidgetty. The place and the woman did not seem to accord. Before night this conviction grew upon him to an extent that was positively uncomfortable. About five o'clock, he looked at his watch, gave a few directions to Mr. Slade, and started off out of the office. He made his way directly to the upholsterer's.

"Gardiner," he said, "I want my office fixed up. I hav'n't had a thing done to it for years, and it's getting too shabby to be borne. I want a new carpet, a good Brussels, I guess, they wear the longest, and a set of curtains—since we've got the windows washed, the light is unbearable—and some good new office chairs."

"A Brussels carpet, Mr. Darrell," said Gardiner, in some surprise, "for an office! Why, the dirt that will be tracked in on it, in one month, will ruin it."

"Well, we *won't have* dirt tracked in on it. We'll put a mat outside, and a scraper, if necessary."

Mr. Gardiner saw that his customer was in earnest, and at once commenced to take the order.

"You'd better go right down to-night, and get the measure for the carpet," said Mr. Darrell, "and do the thing up as soon as possible."

And so it came to pass, that in a week's time Mr. Darrell's office, from being dark and dingy and dismal, was light and clean, and well furnished; a place fit for a lady, and, as he began to perceive, for a gentleman. Certain other perceptions began to dawn also on Mr. Darrell's mind. Slade was a good book-keeper, quite unexceptionable in a business way; but, outside of business, certain reports had come to Mr. Darrell's ears, not altogether creditable to the young man. In fact, sundry boasts and not very delicate insinuations of the gentleman himself, had quite confirmed these rumors. Men have an instinctive recognition of their own coarse natures, and do not easily feel themselves debased by association; so, though Mr. Darrell was himself entirely true to his marriage vows, he, nevertheless, could smile at the rather serious peccadillos of a young man like Slade; and, as he was faithful and honest, which last Mr. Darrell took great pains, day by day, to insure that he should be, he practically thought little the worse of him for them. But Mr. Darrell had

spoken only the truth, when he remarked that he had very great respect for Reba. Moreover, his nearly twenty years of intimate association with a woman so pure and noble as his wife, had refined his mind and deepened his intuitions to that degree that, as, day by day, he saw Slade bending over Reba's desk or chair in the necessary intercourse of the office; as he watched the look of restrained sensualism in his eye, and the occasional laxity of his attitudes and gestures—little things which a woman might have felt, but would never have seen, for Mr. Leslie Slade was, outwardly, very respectful to Reba—he began to feel an undefined uneasiness creep over him.

"Confound the man," he exclaimed to himself, "can't he keep his sensuality out of sight here, in the office? That woman is no parlor doll-baby. She will be sure to read him, and to feel insulted by his presence."

But Mr. Slade was by no means to be blamed for his want of reticence. He did try very hard, feeling instinctively how necessary it was to his self-respect in her presence, to impress Reba with a sense of his gentlemanliness. If he failed, it was simply because, when a man's whole being is pervaded with impure and sensual desires, there is no disguise in the universe that will hide it from even a tolerably true eye. Reba knew the man at once, and it grated upon her feelings to be obliged to meet him in daily and hourly intercourse. "However," she said, "this is one of the penalties one pays for leaving, even temporarily, the natural and prescribed walks of womanly labor. If it was right to come here at all, it is right to bear this infliction in silence, so long as the man is personally respectful. If, however, Mr. Darrell had carried the removal of unclean things from his office a little farther, and put this man out of the way, I should certainly have been better pleased."

It is not quite clear to the perceptions of many virtuous

souls, that the mixing in society of men of foul lives and degrading associations is, in itself, a contamination. In the parlor, etiquette imposes, or is supposed to, many wholesome restraints, which, if men and women mingled more freely in public intercourse, would be found to be wholly inadequate. If ever society is purged of its foulness in this respect, the work must be begun upon the lower planes of life, and men themselves must learn to draw distinctions.

On the whole, however, Reba's life at the office was not unpleasant. The labor was comparatively light, the salary better than most occupations offer to women; it was, besides, a new field of observation and study, and the annoyances to which her sex exposed her were, she often fancied, less than the amusement she derived from the same source. It was rather pleasing, she thought, to notice how deftly cigars were slipped to one side by the more refined callers at the office; how again and again coarse language and rude behavior were checked by her presence; the profane word omitted from the exclamation, and a milder one substituted.

"I begin to be converted," she said to Mrs. Darrell, one evening, "to your view of things. I do believe that the most neglected missionary work in the world is that which women ought to be doing for men, by mingling with them in the ordinary avocations of life."

As for Mr. Darrell, he was well pleased with his new clerk.

"But, then," he said to Laura, "you mustn't argue too much from the success of this experiment. Reba is certainly a treasure, but ninety-nine other women would be nuisances. She is exact, faithful and capable. She is a perfect lady in her manners; she compels, without herself being aware of it, the respect of every man who comes into the office. Such a woman as that would win her way anywhere."

"That is the great trouble concerning women," said Laura; "they are, by training and the circumstances of their lives, as a general thing, so incapable, so lacking in comprehension of anything in the way of business-like exactness and faithfulness."

"Yes," said Ralph, "I've often noticed that it is never the *good* seamstresses, the *good* cooks, the *good* housemaids, who are out of work and fall into distresses. A really smart, efficient, capable woman can do anything she pleases in the world. She has twenty chances where a man has one; her sex tells in her favor; which is one reason that I so soon get out of patience when I hear about single women, women without children, starving for want of work. As a general thing, those who starve are small loss to the world!"

"Oh! Ralph! Ralph! you are ungenerous now; for, say what you may, when it comes to the matter of earning one's own living, the laws and the customs are all oppressive, to the last degree, where women are concerned. And when you add to this the fact that they are taught from their cradles that they cannot and ought not to do as much as men, being naturally the weaker vessels, yet, at the pinch, find that it requires just as much food to keep them from starving, and just as much clothing to keep them from freezing, as if they were men, it is no wonder that so many of them become discouraged, and either sink into helplessness, or, worse, into that yawning gulf which the profligacy of men keeps ever open at their feet."

"Well, now, I deny that the laws and customs are altogether to blame. Just you suppose that one-half the women who are starving to death at plain sewing were to educate themselves as scientific and practical cooks—which any smart woman might do in the kitchen of her wealthy neighbor; and half the women who are elbowing each other so uncomfortably as teachers—say *that* half which

plainly confess that they have no love for the vocation, but only practice it for the pay—should fit themselves by cheerful endeavor for intelligent, faithful nurse-girls, do you suppose they would get a cold shoulder from the world? I think not. Why, I know of forty families that would hail such an one as a godsend, and pay any price for her services. It is not opportunity, but pride, and want of inclination to work, that starves many women. In the old countries, a good housekeeper, or a good nurse-maid in a wealthy family, is considered quite equal socially to the wives of small tradespeople, and I do not know any reason why they would not take even higher rank here. In this country, it is especially true that it is shiftlessness and incapacity that are looked down upon. Why, we have so little of the spirit of caste, that we respect a *good* clam-digger more than a bad poet! The truth is, that the present generation of women are singularly inefficient and incapable of doing *anything* in a *thorough*, business-like way."

Laura thought a minute very soberly.

"Ralph," she said "the present generation of women have, as a general thing, been *regularly trained* to do nothing whatever, but to depend upon men to work and think, and almost breathe for them. They have been taught that it is unladylike to work, to be in any way useful; that the only way for a woman to live is to get married, and to exact from the man she marries the greatest possible amount of gratification, for the least possible return. That is their vocation. Whether or not they are mistresses of it, let the husbands of some of our fashionably educated women testify."

"Now, Laura, it is you who are unjust. If women lack training, pray whose fault is it? What are all our female colleges and seminaries of learning for?"

"Principally to enable women to make herbariums and

calculate eclipses. When you speak of the educational advantages afforded to women, you touch a delicate subject. It has long been my opinion, that, as a nation, we stultify ourselves in this particular, in a way which, in any practical business matter, would stamp us as fools at once. It is all very well for a woman to be able to sail a ship according to the latest theories of navigation, or to analyze chemically any known or unknown substance, provided first, that she do not thereby neglect a knowledge of her first and most obvious duties as a woman—good house-keeping, good nursing, and, above all, the difficult and incalculably important duties of maternity; and, secondly, that she be provided with some way of earning her own living, when that becomes necessary.

“If women were educated to do their own work well, it is true that they would not be so utterly helpless, when thrown upon the world, to take care of themselves. If, besides, those girls who are evidently liable to be so placed—the daughters of men themselves dependent upon their own exertions, the daughters of widows, orphan girls without means—if these could have an equal knowledge of practical affairs with boys, it would avail them vastly more toward keeping body and soul together, and preserving the priceless jewel of their honor from the rapacity of men, than much Greek and mathematics. That, or else, being fitted for the learned professions, let the learned professions be opened to them. To educate a large class of our girls to the same tastes and habits to which we would educate our boys, if we designed them for doctors, or lawyers, or ministers, and then tell them, ‘you must teach or starve,’ when, if there were an equal distribution of scholars among such aspirants, there would be about three pupils to a teacher, is certainly absurd.”

“But girls don’t have time to learn everything, Laura.”

“Neither do boys; for which excellent reason they are

only expected to learn that which will be most useful or indispensable to them. That is simple common sense; but it somehow seems to be impossible for men to exercise common sense, where the advantages or privileges of women are concerned."

"But, when all is said and done, there is a large class of women who are *naturally* incapable of taking care of themselves. Weak in body, weak in spirit, purposeless, inefficient, mere waifs on the great ocean of humanity."

"Yes, there are such men, too. That the women of this class are more numerous, is, I believe, simply because of the errors in training which we have just been discussing. But it is a sore, sore wrong, which underlies all that stratum of society. These people who are *naturally* incapable, are so, nine times out of ten, because they truly reflect the discouragements, the heart-weariness, the secret pinings and regrets of the mothers who bore them. Ralph, when I look around me, and see the terrible disadvantages under which women labor, at their great sacred office of maternity, I wonder not at the weakness of the race, but at its indomitable energy and life. If there is any being in the world more to be pitied than the woman whose every energy is taxed for the support of the new life; whose days are filled with a thousand nameless discomforts, and her nights with wakefulness and suffering; who feels herself, too often, neglected by her husband, just when she most needs his utmost tenderness and sympathy; the victim of nervous fears and premonitions, compelled to labor, deprived of many of the genial, harmonizing influences of the outer world; if there is anybody more to be pitied than this neglected, suffering, helpless woman, it is the weak, desponding, incapable offspring, she must of necessity bring into the world. I have seen such ones, that made my heart ache more than any case of acute

suffering I ever saw. Incapable of taking care of themselves, incapable of inspiring any interest in others which would lead to assistance, oftentimes cursed with the vain, hopeless, aimless longings, which beset the suffering but uncomplaining mother, with no earthly chance of ever seeing them gratified;—ah! Ralph, these are they whom the Christ commanded us to forgive the ‘seventy times seven’ sins. Ralph, thinking of these alone makes my heart burn within me to raise my hand and voice in behalf, not of women, but of all the weak and down-trodden of the race.”

“Laura,” said her husband, tenderly, “don’t get excited. You are just laying off the burdens of your life. Don’t take the world on your shoulders quite yet. Give yourself a little rest.”

As age crept toward Mr. Darrell, and his blood steadied itself a little, he leaned more and more upon his faithful, large hearted wife; he cherished her tenderly; he gained a quicker and deeper insight into her wants; he depended more upon her judgment, and trusted more to her intuitions. And as Laura, her nature expanded and toned to a sweeter beneficence by the loves and duties of womanhood, passed from the narrow and partial reach of youth, to the grander range and wider horizon of middle age, and felt, as the true woman ever does feel, as she passes this mysterious line, her mother-heart grow great toward all the race, he began to see, as he never had seen before, the true significance of woman’s calling; and to feel as she felt, that the fruit which had ripened in his own household, under his own eye, yet how often with little help from him, was meet for the world’s acceptance. And yet his soul was divided with weak and not unselfish longings to hold his treasure back, to keep for himself, and his own home, all that warmth of love, that depth and clearness of spiritual insight. Therefore, he said: “Give yourself

a little rest. Don't put on the new harness too soon. You are not strong enough for it."

"My husband," she said, looking steadily at him, her great, gray eyes shining now with inward light; "my husband, it is the nature of women to grow strong in giving, rather than receiving. Do not hold me back; but let me feel, instead, your strong arm around me for support and defense. So I shall be invulnerable."

There was a moisture in his eyes, as he answered: "Laura, God does dwell more nearly with women than with men. Lead you the way; I follow. You shall be eyes to see; I strength to execute."

XXII.

AMONG THE "VINES."

In the three years which had elapsed since his wife's death, Abraham Gladstone's fortunes had steadily improved. His whole strength and energy had been concentrated upon the one object of winning back his hereditary position. Till he saw the mortgage upon the old estate cancelled, and the power in his hands to reside there in the old state and glory, he was determined to give no thought to any other matter.

Such singleness of purpose was characteristic of the man. He had not a brilliant mind; would never carry off fortune's prizes by storm. He was not gifted with quick and deep insight. His words ever came slowly, and in public speaking were never redundant. But he was careful, painstaking, thorough. In forensic debates, he was clear and forcible, rather than eloquent; his logic was simple and had a certain mathematical accuracy and precision which always told with a jury. In cases where the feelings of his audience were interested, he seldom drew tears, but often touched a certain minor key of sadness that reaches below the tear-ducts—which lie, after all, very near the surface—into the hidden places of sorrow itself.

Without at all possessing those shining surface gifts, which oftenest render a man what is called popular, he still had gained a fast hold upon the hearts and minds of the people among whom he lived. They knew that he was an honest man. You could not impanel a jury within twenty miles of Wyndham, that wouldn't believe every word that Abraham Gladstone told them to be true.

They knew him to be earnest and hard-working, with a native goodness of heart, which, in spite of his pressing want of money, led him always to undertake the cause of a poor man as readily as if he were rich, provided he were certain that he was in the right. For these reasons, it happened that he had not unfrequently been nominated for county and state offices, and had never yet been defeated. Parties were pretty equally divided, and the leaders of the liberal side had already begun to speak of Abraham Gladstone as the most available candidate for the next Congressional election. He was, therefore, emphatically a rising man.

This very spring of which we write, he had so reduced the mortgage upon the old estate, that he felt himself practically out of debt, with a sure income which would warrant him in opening the family mansion whenever he should find the proper person to be mistress of it. This being well understood to be the case, there was naturally a flutter of anxiety through all the female part of the community; for a handsome, good tempered man like Mr. Gladstone, who at thirty-five was the foremost man in the county, would not be likely to go begging for a wife.

Mr. Gladstone understood this fact perfectly, and accepted it with the usual masculine complacency. However, it by no means reduced the difficulty of a choice. Just at the present juncture, there were two ladies who stood out with some prominence from the ranks of his female admirers.

The first, my pen hesitates to confess it, was Miss Lillie Meredith, the only child of the widow lady with whom Mr. Gladstone had boarded for the last two years.

Searching about for reasons for this prominence of Miss Lillie's claims, I can only find two: the first, propinquity; and the second, the fact that Mr. Gladstone was a man. If this last seems still a little obscure, I shall endeavor

hereafter to shed some light upon it. Miss Lillie was a fair-haired young lady of about nineteen summers, though few persons would have judged her to be more than seventeen, so girlish and immature were her manners. Her mother was a poor woman, who worked all her days and many of her nights to maintain herself and daughter. Or, rather, more truthfully, her daughter. The entire cost of her own keeping would hardly have paid for that young lady's boots. Miss Lillie had been sent to the Academy ever since she was nine years old. She had been taught French, and music, and drawing, and dancing. She knew about as much about kitchen work as one of the flies which buzzed about her mother's kitchen window panes. She had never made a bed in her life; she had never swept a room in her life; she had never made a petticoat for herself, though she may possibly have achieved tatting enough to put about the edge of one when her mother had otherwise finished it, but be sure she never sewed the tatting on.

But Miss Lillie was very pretty, very accomplished, very engaging. She was always nicely dressed, when Mr. Gladstone saw her; for if she was up late, and had no time to take her hair out of the curling pins before the breakfast bell rang, she would not go down to breakfast. And then her mamma, sitting behind the coffee-urn and looking solicitous, said:

"Poor Lillie, she studies so hard that she never feels well in the mornings. Kate, you'd better take a cup of coffee and a bit of toast to her room."

And Kate, who knew her young mistress a great deal too well to approach her with so poor a show of good eating, stopped in the kitchen and added a bit of steak and an omelet.

Miss Lillie had the manners of a half-grown kitten; she was just so lithe and purring, and soft, and lively.

Mr. Gladstone meeting her on the porch, with a pout on her lip, would say:

"How now, Miss Lillie, what is that great pout for? Anything serious the matter?"

"I should think there was, but I'm not going to tell you, for you're a man and would laugh at me."

"For shame, Miss Lillie, I never laughed at you in my life."

Thereupon she would pout and look up coyly, advance a step, retreat two, keeping up all the time a skirmishing fire from her eyes; till, at last, it was ten chances to one that she managed to get behind the grape vine, and then Mr. Gladstone by way of entreaty, somehow got his hand on her arm or about her waist. He was an old friend, you know, and being very determined to find out the secret of that pout, pressed her so hard that she by and by whispered so low that he had to bend his ear just in reach of her saucy curls to hear it, that there was to be a concert at the Hall next evening, and she could not go, for that clown, Sam Ainsworth had asked her, and her mamma had said he was not a proper person for her to go with, and had forbidden her ever being seen with him anywhere.

"And I had to tell him a little fib to get rid of him. There, now, go away, you saucy man. You've got it all; but you know I'd never have told you if you hadn't made me."

"But, no," says Mr. Gladstone, "you hav'n't told me what the fib was."

"Oh! and never, never, never will," says Miss Lillie. "You might go down on your knees to me and I wouldn't."

But he don't go down on his knees, and she does tell him that she told Sam Ainsworth she was previously engaged; and then she actually cries a little.

Whereupon, Mr. Gladstone begs her to comfort herself, for it was no fib at all, as she is always previously engaged

to him in all such cases; and then, in the humblest way in the world, as if it were the greatest possible favor, he asks her will she honor him by going with him; and she whispers in such a soft, purring way:

“Yes, indeed, if mamma will allow.”

Mamma does allow, and Miss Lillie is very highly gratified with the success of her strategy.

So now I hope you understand what I meant by saying that one of the reasons for Miss Lillie's prominence in the ranks of competitors was the fact that Mr. Gladstone was a man.

The other lady was Miss Azarian Ridalhuber. This young woman was not a native of Wyndham, but an exotic, sent, with great care and some expense, from a choice nook in Japonicadom, for the express purpose of some time blooming in the now chill and deserted bowers of the Gladstone mansion.

It was a sad story, Miss Azarian thought; she always alluded to it, if at all, with downcast eyes, and a portentous sigh. The Ridalhubers had once been very wealthy. But losses came, and then failure, and then poor papa got into such sad ways, and mamma's fortune, which really was quite large, only it was a very expensive family, three sons you know, was sadly strained to keep the house going. And so, though this was never hinted, this Miss Azarian had been sent out to these rural shades to spend the summer with her cousin, Mrs. Evans, the minister's lady, and, if possible, make a brilliant match. Of course, looking the ground over, she judged that she had a prescriptive right to Mr. Gladstone, and began to lay her plans, with intense scorn of all rustic rivals.

Mr. Evans was a ripe scholar, a Christian of deep spiritual experience, and a genial, excellent man. It was a little doubtful whether his wife was as thoroughly divorced as himself from “the world, the flesh and the devil.” At

any rate, she still cherished a kindly pride in the glories of her family, who were nearly connected with the Ridalhubers; and had taken great pains, and been at some expense of exact verity, to produce the impression in Wyndham, that her cousin, Miss Azarian, was a belle, an heiress, and a most distinguished ornament of the very highest circle of New York society, and had no motive whatever in secluding herself in Wyndham, when she might be leading captive the millionaires who haunt the summer watering places, except her tender affection for her devoted cousin Elisa, or, as Miss Azarian always pronounced it, Élise.

Miss Ridalhuber certainly had some claims to the appellation of a beauty. She was of medium height, with a slight figure, and a pale, wax-like complexion. Her eyes and hair were a handsome shade of brown, and well matched. Her features were regular and fine, and the tone of her manners corresponded precisely to the tone of her face. She was refined, feminine, and imperturbably self-possessed.

These two, Mrs. Evans and her cousin Azarian, sat in the little parlor of the parsonage, engaged, each of them, with their embroidery, and chatting after that easy, unrestrained fashion, which the female heart so much delights in. About the fashions, I think.

"Azarian, how did it happen that you had the courage to get one of those new summer bonnets? I dread to have you take it out of the bandbox, the gentlemen do so ridicule them."

"Indeed!" said Miss Ridalhuber, deliberately counting, "one, two, three, four of black, and five, six of the red. Cousin Élise, do you happen to remember any fashion for the last ten years, and I presume it has been the same for ten centuries, which the gentlemen didn't ridicule? Why, it is a thing to be expected."

"That is very true," said Mrs. Evans. "If the bonnets are large enough to cover the face, then they are hideous, and scoops, coal scuttles, etc., are too graceful to be compared with them. If they are small and set off the head, Punch immediately suggests that the next fashion will be to have the bonnet carried behind the lady on a waiter. If dresses are made long, they sweep the mud of the streets; if short, the ladies are getting impatient to expose their ankles. If the cloaks are loose, they are dowdy and inelegant; if tight, they make it impossible to distinguish between males and females on the streets. When men will be so inconsistent, it is foolish ever to heed them; but, then, one can't help it. Now, Mark exchanges with Mr. Linscott, you know, on Sunday, and *couldn't* you put off bringing out the summer bonnet, till after that?"

"Next Sunday will be the first in June," said Miss Ridalhuber, composedly. "I never wore a spring bonnet in June in my life. I think Mr. Linscott's coming a very good reason for bringing out the new one. It will make an impression on him, see if it don't."

"Of course you know best," said Mrs. Evans, "but, then, I own I have my fears. But here comes Gladstone up the walk. Look your sweetest, Aza."

Miss Ridalhuber did not seem in the least to heed the admonition, but went on with her counting as if nothing were about to happen. Well she might; for her toilet that day had cost her an hour's effort, in anticipation of this very event. Her hair was dressed with the skill of a French coiffeur, and with a simplicity and taste which that dignitary would never have imparted to it; her dress was lady-like and elegant, with nothing noticeable about it, except its richness, and a rose-tinted ribbon at her throat, which lighted her pale face with just the faintest and most becoming glow.

As Mr. Gladstone entered, she received him with the most elegant grace and composure, and allowing him to open the conversation, followed his lead with skill and intelligence, at the same time carefully preserving her own subordination. Ah! she was well trained to her part, was Miss Azarian.

She touched a finer key than ever had vibrated in Mr. Gladstone's soul before. He was deeply impressed; he had the same kind of admiration for her that he would have had for a fine painting or a fine statue, with the added warmth which her feminine graces inspired. He sat for an hour drawing her out, yielding himself to the charm of her liquid voice. Finally, she sang for him. She was thoroughly trained, and at his especial request she sang "Kathleen Mavourneen." There came a moisture into Mr. Gladstone's eyes, and a trembling about his heart-strings such as he had not felt for years.

As he went out, the dusk was coming on, rosy and lucent; and, from the bush at the door, he broke a half blown rosebud, and said, with a grace into which his honest heart infused a something which assured Miss Ridalhuber that it was not wholly an idle compliment:

"Will you accept it, Miss Ridalhuber? It will bloom more worthily for you, than even for the stars outside here."

She took it with a tremulous sigh that was not all feigned. Few women could resist Mr. Gladstone's eyes, when he chose to make them effective, simply because they were honest eyes.

As he walked down the flower-scented path, the brightness of the dusk fading into cooler tints of pearl and gray, his thought still lingered about Miss Ridalhuber.

"If one could only be certain," he said to himself, "that she had a heart;" and there went a little thrill through his veins as he thought of the delicious abandon with which he had seen Lillie Meredith throw herself into her mother's arms.

"She's a little goose," he said, "but she's a very fond one;" and there came up bitter, regretful memories, and a firm determination, whatever else he did, not to marry a woman who had no heart.

In the midst of these reflections he reached the village store, and saw Mr. Darrell on the steps. The sight at once recalled business to his mind.

"Good evening, Darrell," he said; "I want to ask you if that young lady clerk of yours would do copying for me. My clerk has left me, and, if I could get a good copyist, I shouldn't need another, just now. Would she favor me, do you think?"

"Very likely. I'll ask her. She writes a good hand for your purpose, and you'll find her very neat and exact, and tolerably rapid."

"Just the thing. If she is agreeable, you may ask her to call at my office to-morrow."

"I'll do so," said Mr. Darrell, and they parted.

The doctor was just unhitching the old gray, preparatory to starting home with his evening's mail. Seeing Mr. Gladstone, his eye at once took in the fact that he was dressed for calling.

"H'm!" said the doctor, partly as a guess, partly to lead the conversation in a direction that suited him. "Been down—to the—minister's—I s'pose; been down to the minister's?"

Mr. Gladstone assented.

"That Miss Ridalhuber is a good *looking* girl," said the doctor; "pretty—good—looking; but she hasn't much money. The last time I was in New York, I asked some questions about her. The family has had money, but lost the most of it. The father drinks; the sons drive fast horses. The daughters have got to get married. If they can't marry in the city, where they are known, they must go to the country, where they are not known. She's a

pretty fair looking girl, though. Sings well; sings—*well*; but—there— isn't—so—much—*money*—there—as folks think."

By this time the doctor was seated in his chaise, and had taken up the reins. Mr. Gladstone made some remark about the weather, to which the doctor assented with a

"Yes—yes. Go—'long—Dorothy."

The doctor had never told this story of his about Miss Azarian before—would never tell it again, perhaps. He knew very well that Gladstone would not repeat it. How did he know so well, when and where to drop those few words, sure of their taking effect? Mr. Gladstone himself wondered, but could not tell. The truth was just this. The instant the doctor's eye rested on Mr. Gladstone's white waistcoat, this train of thought ran through his brain: "Been to see a woman; wouldn't put on a white waistcoat for any Wyndham woman. Miss Ridalhuber. He's free, means marriage. She means marriage, too. "*I'll tell*;" and the doctor did tell; but Mr. Gladstone was a little farther gone than the doctor had calculated, and found himself speculating as he walked home:

"Poor girl! with her refinement and her quiet ways, she must have a hard time of it, if the doctor is right, and he always is, about those matters. If a man were to take her out of such a home, and give her wealth, and position, and love, wouldn't she be grateful and love him in return?"

Mr. Gladstone thought she would.

XXIII.

MISS RIDALHUBER'S SUMMER BONNET.

Reba rested her head upon her hand and smiled, when Mr. Darrell laid before her Mr. Gladstone's proposition concerning the copying. She did not tell any one what that smile meant, but it is very possible that it had some connection with the scenes of her previous acquaintance with Mr. Gladstone. She was silent for a moment.

"I didn't give him any encouragement," said Mr. Darrell, "except to recommend you for the work; and I shall say nothing more to you, than that Gladstone is a gentleman, and will treat you with the utmost respect; and if you can oblige him, it would be pleasing to me."

"Thank you, Mr. Darrell," she said, looking up at him. "I know Mr. Gladstone quite well already, or did, some years ago. He must have forgotten the prejudices of his family against me."

"Reba, I think Mr. Gladstone buried a good deal in that grave over yonder, besides the body of his wife. I always liked, and I am sure you will no longer dislike him, if you will only hold yourself amenable to circumstances. You don't look pleased. Shall I tell him, no?"

Reba had at first felt a strong disinclination to the arrangement, but, just at the instant that she was about to say so, a sudden impulse controlled her, as we are all sensible of being controlled at certain times in our lives, and she said:

"No; I'll try it. If I do not like it, it is easy enough to say so afterwards. You may tell Mr. Gladstone that I will call at his office, as he proposes."

Reba did call, in that instance; but afterwards, Mr. Gladstone, seeming to be struck with the impropriety of

treating her with less than the courtesy he would have bestowed upon his most dignified and refined lady friend, always delivered the manuscript to her, either at her desk at Mr. Darrell's office, or at the house.

It was an evening, early in June. A cold north wind prevailed, and the little circle in Mrs. Darrell's parlor had drawn around a bright wood fire upon the hearth, and were already settled at their evening's work, when a visitor was announced. It was Mr. Leslie Slade, who had a way of now and then calling at his employer's house, mostly as a pleasant social formality, but incidentally with a view of making himself agreeable to Miss Maude, now a tall, handsome girl, in her sixteenth year.

Concerning this same Mr. Slade, there had been more than one animated discussion in the Darrell household. Laura had said to her husband:

"Ralph, now that our girls are growing up to womanhood, I do protest against that young man being allowed to visit here. He is not a fit associate for Maude, and it would be a great satisfaction to me if you would give him to understand that we think so."

"Well, my dear," Ralph had replied, "I don't know; few young men are immaculate. Slade is of good family, and good breeding. If we begin to make distinctions, it is difficult to tell where we shall end. If he were at all particular in his attentions to Maude, that would be different. Of course I should interfere. But, to tell the truth, he is useful to me in a business way, and I don't like to offend him."

"But, Ralph, when a young man's immoralities are the talk of the town, I am sure it need not be difficult to draw some line, which shall leave him outside of it. If you like him in a business way, that is your affair, and I have nothing to say. But, then, if you are supreme in your office, I ought to be equally so in my parlor."

"Very well," said Ralph, "quarrel you, with Slade, if you will, but don't ask me to do it."

And so the matter rested; Laura only waiting for a good opportunity. On this especial evening, Maude was not present, and when the young man's form darkened the doorway, Laura formed a resolve, which she found means to execute before the evening was over.

A few minutes later Mr. Gladstone dropped in, upon an errand to Reba. She was sitting a little apart from the rest, sewing by the evening lamp, so that Mr. Gladstone, as he seated himself, after delivering his papers to her, found himself near the chimney, with Rebecca in the corner of the room, at his left. Mrs. Darrell sat exactly opposite him, in her handsome easy chair, while in front of the fire sat the master of the house, and Mr. Slade.

Somehow, into the light social chat, which at first prevailed, there drifted an allusion to Miss Ridalhuber's summer bonnet.

"It was very *outré*," Mr. Slade insisted; "quite hideous, in fact."

Mr. Gladstone thought it had a stylish look; but, then, it was certainly a little too striking for a town like Wyndham.

Mrs. Darrell had no opinion of her own to offer. She had never considered herself authority in such matters, but she had heard one gentleman, at least, admire the bonnet, in almost unlimited phrase. He had characterized it at as "handsome," "elegant," "quite out of the common order," and had asserted, that, in point of taste, Miss Ridalhuber was "a lady altogether to be admired."

"Who was that?" cried Mr. Gladstone.

"You, Darrell?" asked Slade.

"Not I, indeed," said Mr. Darrell.

"It was Mr. Linscott," elucidated Mrs. Darrell. At which there was a general exclamation.

Reba only adjusted her sewing, and smiled.

From that, the chat flowed on to woman's dress, in general. Of course the gentlemen waxed eloquent concerning the extravagance of women, their fickleness, their bad taste, their want of modesty and all the other good old-fashioned graces, after the manner of men in general.

But Mr. Slade was especially emphatic. At the close of a long tirade upon the extravagance of women, he exclaimed:

"Why, a man must be independently rich, now, before he dares to marry. What could a man, on a salary, like myself, for instance, do with a wife?"

Mrs. Darrell's time had come. There was no cloud upon her brow; her voice was very calm and even, but there was a "sense of thunder in it," nevertheless.

"Mr. Slade," she said, "would it cost you more to support your wife, than it does to support your mistress?"

Mr. Slade grew red, then pale, then red again, and would have looked indignant, had the blow been a whit less severe. As it was, he presented a very limp appearance, and merely stammered that that was a subject he did not like to discuss with ladies, and taking his hat, bowed himself out of the room.

There might have been an awkward pause, if Mr. Gladstone had not come to the rescue, by saying good naturedly:

"Mrs. Darrell, I see that the Woman's Rights Convention is to meet very soon, and I suggest that the ladies of this neighborhood send you as a delegate."

"With very sincere respect for that body," said Laura, "I must still decline the honor of a seat in their meetings. When I take the field, I shall not join the mounted dragoons, but rather organize myself as a light artillery company for independent service."

"The papers wickedly say," said Mr. Darrell, "that 'the dear old creatures intend to demand the suffrage.'"

"If women had the right of suffrage," said Rebecca, "I think the papers would, at least, learn to be civil."

"Why, Miss March," said Mr. Gladstone, "would *you* like to vote?"

The tone was precisely the one in which he would have said to an elephant: "My dear sir, would *you* like to dance?"

She replied with an inflection equally significant:

"Mr. Gladstone, I shall never go down on my knees for the privilege of trailing my skirts through the world's dirty work. For woman to take part in politics as they have hitherto been conducted, would be a condescension. But I think it requires no very remarkable prophetic insight, to discern a prospect, that by the time men have practiced for a few years longer, admitting all that is low and coarse and debased to the polls, they will have brought politics to such a muddle that they will be thankful to entreat the more refined powers of the nation to come to their rescue. In such a case, I would not be hard-hearted."

Mr. Gladstone raised his eyebrows a trifle.

"I am afraid," he said, "that it would be uncourteous to tell you how well we of the male sort have so far managed without you."

"The question is," said Laura, "whether you *have* managed *as well as*, all things considered, you ought to have done. Whether, in excluding women from politics, you have not done yourselves and the nation's affairs a wrong, corresponding to that which is manifest wherever else the humane and unselfish element of our common nature is excluded. The politics of a great nation ought to be something broad, unselfish, elevating; but, until within the past few years, when women have, by force of their innate persistency, rather than because of much courtesy on the part of men, made their voices heard in public matters, have not the affairs of this nation been managed in a

narrow, unenlightened, illiberal spirit, attended by proverbial venality and corruption. The publication of Uncle Tom's Cabin, marks an era in our politics. It was followed by public meetings in which women participated as spectators; and at last by large, intelligent and enthusiastic assemblages, who listened with delight to the utterances of a woman upon purely political questions. From that hour, politics took a more celestial hue."

"It seems to me," said Mr. Darrell, "that right here comes in a very useful distinction. So long as the politics of the country had reference mostly to building railroads, conducting finances, and waging war, there was little cause for the interference of women; but now that we are becoming so advanced in civilization, that legislation is as much as anything a matter of doing justice and loving mercy, the women of the nation may justly have as much voice and influence as the men."

"Yes, but if women vote, they must also sit upon jurors' seats and judges' benches. I hope I may not live to practice law in that time."

"Now, Mr. Gladstone, are you talking badinage, or are you talking sense?" said Laura. "Suppose ten years ago, when your dear mother was living, and my mother was in her prime—"

"Oh! but I'm not talking about *such* women."

"It is precisely about *such* women that *I am* talking. It is the intention of the law that none but good men shall sit upon a jury; why not, therefore, particularize good women."

"But, as a general thing, the intention of the law is woefully defeated; especially in large towns, where jurors are drawn either from among the loafers and hangers-on about a court room, or else from among business men, whose time is so valuable to them, that they will agree to anything rather than be kept waiting for an hour. The

matter is bad enough now; don't ask us to complicate it by admitting women."

"It seems to me that such a state of things as you represent could hardly be made worse by the admission of women."

"Oh! yes, it would; we should never get a verdict then, for no one could possibly imagine that twelve women would ever agree."

"If I wished to be witty, I would say, so much the better. If such difficulties beset law suits, fewer people would engage in them; which, however it might annoy the lawyers, would be better for mankind at large. But, to speak seriously, it is certain that women cannot find essential justice at the hands of juries composed entirely of men. Reading up this subject the other day, I was struck with an observation of Chancellor Kent. 'The law,' he says, 'makes no provision for the relief of a blind credulity, however it may have been produced.' That single sentence pronounces the doom of woman under the law. One of her distinguishing characteristics, and the one from which spring nearly all the wrongs that man so relentlessly inflicts upon her honor, is that blind credulity concerning the man whom she loves, which nature has implanted in her bosom expressly for the man's true use and benefit. The great majority of married women will testify that, to that loving credulity which helped so powerfully to soften and abate the shocks and disappointments of the first few months or years of married life, their after happiness was mainly owing. Yet, it is by means of this very trait that the licentious man works the ruin of the woman whose love he has sought and won. But in those cases, it is notorious that the law falls utterly short of affording any adequate redress. The helpless woman once betrayed, is not only forever undone, but there can be no justice meted out to her betrayer; nor will

there ever be till intelligent, conscientious women are permitted to assist, both in making and administering the laws."

"But, Mrs. Darrell, there are penalties for these offences."

"Yes, so far as a *man* is injured by them, he can gain redress. The father can sue for the loss of the daughter's services. The dominant sex must not be let to injure each other. The tax payers, too, must not be mulcted. The man must pay just so much for the support of his offspring as shall suffice to keep it from the poor-house. But for the woman's irreparable loss of honor, of reputation, of all that makes life dear or desirable, there is no shadow of redress. If anything more than this were needed to show the selfishness, the utter incompetency of men to make just and equal laws for the whole race, it is to be found in the fact, which every mother knows, that it is absolutely necessary that she should train her daughters to regard the whole male sex, outside the very narrowest limit of the home ties, as the rapacious and perpetual foes of their personal honor. Men make great ado because women are publicly uncivil to them in the matter of accommodation in railroad cars, and all crowded public conveyances; but it is the just penalty which they pay for belonging to a sex which so persistently upholds the right of every man to be a villain."

"My dear," said Mr. Darrell, "that is very strong language. I beg that you will reconsider it. I know a great many men who live lives as pure as any woman."

"No doubt of it, and all honor to them. But that men in general are as pure in their lives as women, is notoriously untrue. Innocent women are seldom the seducers of male virtue, whereas we all know how common it is for men to use every power they possess—money, intrigue, the tenderest arts at their command, to compass the ruin of an innocent woman, and the fact of their having done

so is no disgrace among their peers. Moreover, the sentiment in favor of licentiousness among men is so strong that few men, even among those of immaculate lives, would not consider the accusation of *always having been pure*, a detraction from their manly attributes. 'Oh! we know about these things, we've seen the world,' is their language, and their manner purposely leads to the suspicion that even now they might not be proof against temptation. Worse even than this, is the recklessness with which young men, mere boys, coming fresh from the pure influence of mothers, who, perhaps, have had too much reverence for the innocence and purity of youth to open their eyes naturally and healthfully to the wickedness of the world, are inducted into the grossest and most revolting forms of vice. And the process is so universal that men of character and sound principles shrink from interfering, on account of the sneers and ridicule which they would inevitably encounter. Admit women more freely to commercial circles, to public meetings; give them power to speak and act in this matter on an equal basis with men, and society would soon undergo a purification."

"That there is too much truth in these charges, Mrs. Darrell, no man who knows the world can deny. But, do you imagine that pure and delicate women can mingle in the cesspool of political filth, without debasement?"

"If, in the rudest scenes of war, there are offices which the gentlest woman may undertake without derogating from her high position, surely there ought to be nothing in the peaceful administration of public affairs which need shock or contaminate her. But, admitting the debasement which has fallen upon politics, mainly, as I believe, through the exclusion of women therefrom, the necessity of womanly interference becomes only the more apparent. Contrast the political meetings at which men have been the only speakers, with those addressed by Anna Dicken-

son and attended by thousands of the most cultivated and intelligent women in the nation. And yet, no meetings were ever more enthusiastic, more effective for every pure and good purpose of politics, than these have been. Wherever pure women go, they inspire in men a chivalry, a delicacy, a refinement of bearing, which is impossible to them under any other circumstances."

"Oh! of course, the world has always acknowledged that women were superior to men in certain ways. That is no new truth at all."

"Yes, in a certain highly figurative and ideal sense, as the very farthest stretch of poets and lovers' license, I admit that the world has recognized the claims of woman in this respect. Yet, with strange obtuseness of intellect, man has ever resisted, to the utmost, the embodiment of this ideal truth in fact. He will freely admit that his wife is his better half, but will fight to the death her claim to put her goodness into practice in any wide or general way."

"Let us console ourselves," said Rebecca. "Most new truths in mind and morals crawl out of the shell of some old one. The hub-bub is always great, concerning which is the true bread divine, the old worn-out form, or the new, living, moving, sentient being; but nobody yet ever knew the shell to prevail."

"But this matter of self-arrogation on the part of woman is, I think, serious," said Mr. Gladstone. "It seems to me that the modesty of women is at once impugned when they begin to assert their own superiority."

"They certainly have a forcible example in the conduct of men for the past six thousand years," replied Mrs. Darrell. "But, more than that, it is to be remembered that, while modesty is a grace, justice is a virtue, and self-justice the very base of all virtues. Until women can consistently and conscientiously assert their own rights

and dignities, they will never be in a position to exercise that influence and authority in the world's affairs, which the best good of the race demands that they should exercise."

"It is the way of reaching that position, about which we differ. I certainly honor those noble women who have gone at work silently, and achieved such triumphs in art and science that men have been forced to accord them equality, a great deal more than I can those braggart females who go about proclaiming to the world the equality of the sexes, and never doing a thing, beyond perhaps writing a stale pamphlet or two, or issuing an annual report that nobody ever read, to prove their assertions."

"Speech is silver, silence golden. I know it well. But even Solomon framed his apples of gold in pictures of silver; and those apples of gold, what were they, but 'a word fitly spoken!' And by and by, amid all this clamor of talking, we shall hear that divinely spoken word. Till then we must have patience with broken utterances and half truths, which are like taper lights; good and useful in the darkness, but shrinking into their true insignificance before the splendor of the dawn."

"Gladstone," said Mr. Darrell, "if all my wife claims is true, I should suppose the Mormons must be the most spiritually minded men living. What must be the effect on a man of having from ten to forty priests and spiritual helpers in the house, eh?"

"Very much the same, I should imagine," said Laura, laughing, "as going to church for edification, and hearing twenty sermons all preached at once. I don't think that joke amounts to much, except as an excellent specimen of the kind of argument of which most men think the subject worthy."

"But it really does seem to me, Mrs. Darrell, joking apart, that these new doctrines of yours upset, altogether,

the good old ideas of woman as a domestic being; the helper of man, the ministering angel of the fireside, the meek, gentle, loving refuge of all the troubled and oppressed spirits that seek the household hearth for shelter."

"Not by any means. I insist on all these points as strongly as you can. But I wish you especially to notice, that the happiest marriages, and the happiest homes, the world over, are those in which the woman is revered and trusted as the household divinity, instead of being debased and crushed by ancient laws and superstitions."

"When all the arguments for a proposed reform," said Reba, "are based upon deep, underlying principles, such as Justice, Truth and Love; and all the arguments against it are drawn from superficial circumstances, precedent, prejudice, expediency, appearances, it is easy to guess which side is strongest, and must in the end prevail."

"But I do not conceive that the arguments in this case are so shallow as you intimate. If we seek the authority of literature, it is all on the side of the traditional idea of woman. From Homer down, she is ever the creature of inconsistencies; the finer, yet the weaker being."

"Of inconsistencies; exactly so, because, viewed from man's standpoint, it is *impossible* to harmonize woman's endowments with her calling. From the *true* view-point, she is the *most* harmonious and perfectly adapted being on the face of the earth. But let us look at this matter in detail.

"The early pagan poets were religionists as well, so that all through their works are to be found intimations of the spiritual endowments of woman. In Iphigenia and Cassandra, the idea is alloyed with materialism. The Medeas, the Hecates, the Clytemnestras of ancient Greek tragedy, are revolting to modern taste, simply because they lack the tender spiritual element which we instinctively demand in the true development of a female character. The Alcestis

of Euripides pleases us in proportion as it is more true to this standard; and in the Antigone of Sophocles we recognize the perfection of female character, because the supreme grace and power of the soul assert themselves with a noble defiance of all masculine trammels and enactments. In her magnificent disdain of Creon's boasted laws, her sublime appeal to the absolute fiat of Heaven, and her unconquerable allegiance to it, the character reaches its highest pitch; and it is in this attitude that it has stood out separate and single from all the creations of the heathen poets, for more than two thousand years, as fresh, and glowing, and life-like to-day, as when the plastic essence was fashioned by the Master's hand."

"And I like to think," said Reba, "that the conception of Antigone belonged to the best moralist among the heathen poets. It was Sophocles who wrote that magnificent strophe, which I learned years ago, at my father's knee: 'Oh! for an absolute purity of word and deed, according to those sublime laws which have the heavens for their birth-place, and God for their Author; which the dissolutions of mortal nature cannot change, nor time bury in oblivion. For the divinity is mighty within them, and waxeth not old!' There is not the parallel of that sentiment in the whole range of heathen poetry. It is ever the broadest and ripest minds which hold the most advanced views concerning woman."

"You have certainly, like a good lawyer, made the best of a bad case," said Mr. Gladstone; "but it is still true that the condition of woman, under the rule of the ancient Greeks and Romans, was that of a slave, as both history and literature abundantly testify."

"The old Etruscan women, the mothers of the Roman Republic, were held the equals of their husbands, as the sleeping effigies upon their tombs to-day bear sweet, though silent witness; and the fame of Spartan mothers is still

‘familiar in our ears as household words.’ It was only in the later and more dissolute stages of the old civilization that women were held as slaves; and then the races so holding them were themselves ready for destruction. You see, God has never left the sex without a witness of its grand possibilities, and the promise of its future development. Did you ever think about the causes which led to the decay and fall of those ancient nations?”

“No doubt the condition in which they held women had much to do with their dissolution. No one will deny that where the mothers are slaves, the sons cannot be heroes.”

“But there is a significance not only in the manner, but in the *time* of their downfall. Christ had been born of a virgin, and there was no longer room in the foremost places of the world for a nation which did not reverence women. So, not only were these nations swept from existence, but their destruction was accomplished by a chosen agent. Far away, among the forests of the north, God had raised up a people, strong, valiant, irresistible, the very foundation of whose sturdy morality, the one written and inerasable article of their code of morals was reverence for women; and the Goth and the Saxon conquered and possessed the earth, because the mother of their children was also the divinity of their home.”

“The philosophy of history gets a new reading at your hands, Mrs. Darrell,” said Mr. Gladstone; “but we are wandering from our subject of the testimony of literature concerning the character of woman. I am waiting to remind you that Shakspeare, and Milton, and Goethe, all take the same view of woman; all represent her as the weaker vessel.”

“Thank you for recalling me. The pagan poets, as I have shown you, had some glimmerings of inspiration upon the subject, and are to-day admired just in proportion as they recognized the native nobility of woman. The Christian

poets at first struck out boldly into this theme, and sounded a fuller chord than had ever been struck before. But the German Reformers were essentially masculine and unpoetical in the tone of their minds; and swept out with the Mother of God and the sweet saints' faces, much that was elevating and truly spiritualizing from religion. Literature was quick to feel the new influence. The spirit of the Troubadours, of Dante, of Petrarch, of Tasso, underwent a change. Milton's women are simply abortions, and are so recognized by critics. Shakspeare's women, as confessed by the mass of his commentators, are inferior to his men, for the reason that, noble and beautiful as many of them are, they are mere female men; modifications more or less distinct of the masculine character, and never so much as intimating the possibility of that spiritual insight and illumination, which is the peculiar characteristic of the woman soul. Even in Queen Katherine, who is, perhaps, the strongest of his female characters in that direction, the religious sentiment is simply a grace, a noble habit, becoming her queendom as its ermine did, and never the mightiest impulse of the human soul; the sublimest representative of the Divine nature with which humanity is endowed. As an artistic conception of woman, the Antigone of Sophocles stands far before any Shakspearean female of them all. Goethe, by reason of his constant intercourse with women, "an intercourse which, if it were too indiscriminate to be justified by prudence or virtue, must have been more or less sympathizing and appreciative, misses by a hair's breadth, the luminous secret of woman's super-masculine endowments; and that plainly, because the sensuality of the man had blunted the fine perceptions of the poet."

"But as women of genius have appeared, a new and better light is thrown upon the subject. In Jane Eyre and Lucy Snow, lacking, as they do, the harmony and

grace which Shakspeare's or Goethe's touch would have conferred upon them, you still catch distant glimpses of that horizon beyond a horizon which marks a woman's life as distinct from a man's; and in Aurora Leigh and the Duchess May, those uncertain apparitions become glowing and delightful certainties. Woman is no longer only a modification; a parasite; but a distinct, independent soul; ill fitted, it is true, for the rougher uses of this material world, but all the more gloriously endowed with the spiritual graces which light up this dim twilight sphere of existence, and make possible here below some faint conception of heaven's ineffable glory."

"I admire your eloquence, Mrs. Darrell; but I still insist that, at least in regard to Shakspeare, I cannot yield the point. To have made Juliet pious would not have improved her to my taste; and if Lady Macbeth had gone into a convent, she would have ceased to be Lady Macbeth. Why, Mrs. Darrell, that sleep-walking scene in Macbeth is worth pages of religious philosophy."

"It is an exquisitely truthful and beautiful portrayal of the terrors of an outraged conscience; but do not, I pray you, confound moral with spiritual issues. Obfuscation of the masculine intellect upon this point is not, indeed, uncommon. The strong faith in the Unseen which characterizes woman, has always been looked upon by men as weakness and fanaticism. It is not the least evidence of the genius of Sophocles, that, when Antigone puts her faith in the Unseen Arm against the tyrant of Athens with the world at his back, Creon cries out that she is mad, was born mad. It is the way of the sex. They are sadly deficient in spiritual comprehension."

"Joan of Arc," said Reba, "is another instance. She was burned for witchcraft by the very men whom she had saved from a great calamity, because they utterly failed to comprehend the sanctity of the power by which she wrought."

"But, ladies, I must beg leave to remind you that there have been men in all ages — poets, prophets, teachers—who have equaled any of your sex in the development of the inspirational gift."

"We are most happy to be so reminded. The argument is simply, that while in the male sex the intuitional gift is exceptional, and mostly accompanied by what is rightly termed a feminine organization, in the female sex it is general; and the very fact that so few such men have been able to gain recognition and appreciation from the age in which they lived, the majority of them dying on the cross, at the stake, in prison, in exile, or in want; is sufficient proof that the inspirational gift of woman could not safely be developed and set free of the world in a rudimentary stage of the race. But since Tennyson and Longfellow are acknowledged by the generation in which they live, instead of starving in a garret, while their books were left to rot on the booksellers' shelves; and even Browning is neither crucified nor stoned, it is not, perhaps, too much to infer that the day has arrived when woman may safely lift up her voice in the market-place, and prophesy and preach, without fear of excommunication or martyrdom."

"I abandon the attempt to defend myself on my own responsibility," said Mr. Gladstone, laughing; "and fall back upon the logic of another. An English writer in one of the reviews, makes use of an argument to me new and somewhat striking. I cannot, of course, quote literally, but it amounts to this. In studying the different classes of the animal creation, it becomes evident that the progress from lower to higher is not direct, but, so to speak, wave-like. That is, that the culmination of the higher faculties precedes the highest structural type. For instance, among quadrupeds, the horse and the fox-hound are nobler than the baboon, yet the baboon is nearer man.

From this it is argued that woman, though nearer the angels than man, is still his inferior in intelligence."

"Now, that," said Reba, "I consider a gratuitous insult."

But Mrs. Darrell smiled.

"Let us be patient, my dear," she said, "with these superior beings. When they get careering on their boasted steed of Reason, they make small account of such trifling circumstances as women and facts. Let us thank them, in the first place, for according to us that structural superiority which we have so long claimed in vain. For the rest, I must beg you to listen to a womanly statement of the case.

"Whatever may be the law of precedence in the lower order of creation, in the highest class it seems to me to be very plain. The distinguishing characteristic of this class is not Reason, as Dr. Abercrombie, than whom is no higher authority on the subject of intellectual phenomena, virtually declares, when he admits that if the argument for immortality be predicated upon Reason, then can no man exclude the brutes therefrom. But it is a sense of moral accountability and worship.

"Now, in this class, spanning the entire space between the brute creation and the Uncreated, there are three orders—Man, Woman and Angels. We are scripturally informed that man was made a little lower than the angels. Will anybody pretend that man or woman reaches the limit of created purity, leaving to the angels only a structural superiority? I think that is absurd on the face of it."

"But I don't see that your reasoning, after all, bears directly upon the relative position of men and women; since it is just as easy to say, Women, Men and Angels, as Men, Women and Angels."

"Your friend of the review admits, by the terms of his argument, the structural superiority of woman. But if he did not, the laws of comparative anatomy settle the point.

Through all the higher forms of animal life the female excels the male in complexity of structure and fineness of use, and is, beyond dispute, the more complete type of development. In the human species this is especially true. Moreover, in point of religious sense and spiritual insight, the distinguishing characteristics of the class, it is so conspicuously true that woman is far in advance of man, that the best minds of the race have always borne testimony to the fact."

"Mrs. Darrell, one would like to know the limits of these assumptions of yours. Would you have the goodness to state just what, if any, excellence or virtue you do allow to men? Are there any crumbs which we may make bold to pick up from your overflowing table?"

"Oh! certainly," she said, laughing. "If you wish my articles of faith, here they are:

"*Credo—imprimis*: That man is physically the larger, stronger, and altogether more imposing being.

"That this fact, together with the predominance of his selfish propensities, an endowment entirely fitted to the sphere of his action, gives to the manifestations of his intellect an aggressive force which is superior to any similar manifestation of which woman is capable.

"That the distinctive work of man is to subdue the earth; that is, to make the material creation subservient to the wants of the race; and to provide the elements of the home.

"That the coarse structure and predominant selfish propensities necessary to this work, are incompatible with the purest moral and spiritual development. That, consequently, this marks the inferior or negative side of his nature.

"*Per contra*:

"That woman has the finer and more enduring physical structure.

"That the characteristics of her mind are correspondingly pure and elevated, rather than strong; while, morally, the predominance of her unselfish and devotional characteristics mark this as the superior or positive side of her nature.

"That her work, as thus indicated, is to create the home, to maintain pure, and elevating, and spiritualizing influences therein; and through the peculiar powers which belong to her sacred office of maternity, to secure to the children whom she bears, strong, and beautiful, and harmonious characters.

"That, beyond this, she has, in her best estate, a mission of purification and spiritualization to the world at large, through which only that spiritual perfection of the race, to which we all look forward, under different names, can possibly come."

"I begin, at least," said Mr. Gladstone, "to see whereon you rest your claim to the equality of the sexes; but it seems to me, that, after all, there must be practically a *head* to the family."

"Undoubtedly. The King is the head of the realm, and ranks the Laureate; and the poet pays, without disgrace, his loyal homage. Yet the King is never so kingly as when he bows the knee to the poet."

"It is a good deal cloudy to me yet," said Mr. Gladstone. "But one thing is plain to my vision, Mrs. Darrell, and that is, you must be in a dangerous condition, with such explosive and revolutionary doctrines seething in your brain. I advise you, in a friendly way, and as a measure of safety, to write a book, and give them vent."

"When I do," said Laura, gaily, "I'll give you honorable mention in it, as that *rara avis*, a man who can hear a woman talk Woman's Rights, and not lose his temper."

"Oh! you see, we of the stronger party can afford to be good natured: because, whatever place your clever theories

and ingenious ratiocinations may assign us in the metaphysical scale, in practical life we still have nine points of the law in our favor. It is a favorite theory with men, that might makes right, and, by your own showing, we have still the might."

"Well, you who believe that physical might is greater than moral might, stand by your colors; and as soon as we can get our forces trained to stand by theirs; to cease making frantic attempts to be men, and to be content to be all that the good word Woman means, we will fight it out squarely with you. The day may be longer or shorter in coming; but, so sure as the world turns around, *it will come.*"

Laura was thoroughly roused, and her tones rang with a martial clangor. Mr. Gladstone had risen to take his leave, and they were all standing, when Reba said, sweetly:

"Let us rather imagine, that, when Woman shall have embodied her Ideal, the presence shall be so majestic, so tender, so irresistible, that man shall gladly bow the knee and do homage, and so the soul of the old-time chivalry shall take a new form, and walk once again among men."

As Mr. Gladstone stepped out under the open sky, winning him upwards with its stars, her words lingered like the vibrations of a silver bell upon his ear.

XXIV.

A PROFESSIONAL VISIT.

It was sometime during the merry month of May, that the old gray horse began to make daily pauses in front of Moses Moss' cottage. It was Moses himself who was sick, this time. It was hard to tell what ailed him, except that the main cause of it, whatever it was, was whiskey. His system had, perhaps, got overcharged at length with the miserable stuff, and so made a faint and feeble reaction against it.

Therefore, as the doctor said, Moses was "down. Some feverish; a bad breath; pretty feeble; needs tonics. Never'll be so strong again as he has been. *Moses* has seen his best days."

This sentence, so oracularly pronounced, had its effect on Moses. He lay very still upon his bed, was peevish and fretful by spells, and by spells thoughtful. Having his miserable life in review before him, perhaps. Not that Moses had been an outrageously wicked man. He had never been that. He was an honest laborer, making every time as good a pair of shoes as he knew how to make; or, if the job were only mending, doing that with equal conscientiousness. He was a kind enough husband and father, on that lower sensual plane on which he had always lived. He tried hard to keep the table well supplied; he would go without a coat himself that his children might have shoes. Had done so year after year when they were coming thick and fast upon him. He had a fondness for his wife, too, though he felt that she was too far above him to make it possible that he should always be level to her mood, or she to his; but the love of his youth had never

died wholly out; and, as year after year passed on, it burst out now and then in some unlooked for and unpractical manner; for true sentiment is always unpractical, whether it blossom in the poet's verse or the peasant's ruder deed. Nor was Moses wholly without that tender, spiritualizing sense, the feeling of the beautiful. In some dark, narrow crypt of his brain lay the germ of that emotion; but it was only now and then that, thrilled by a waft of wandering summer air, or warmed by a slant beam of sunshine, it sent forth an indefinite but hungry feeler. At such times Moses grew ambitious, and with a noble disregard of expense, brought home a new table cover, bright with all the hues of sunset; or a shawl for his wife, whose scarlet glory made her lean figure the one conspicuous thing in the little gray meeting-house, among the flock of browns and drabs and grays there congregated; the consciousness of which was sure to destroy the edification she might otherwise have derived from the services.

But farther than this, could it be said that Moses had any soul-life? What evidence had he ever given of possessing, more than a dog or a horse, any consciousness of the soul's vast inheritance of immortality; or of the possibility of any enjoyments higher than those of the grosser senses?

There is one type of woman for whom I have admiration without emulation. Its representative, with some bright endowments, and a more than ordinary share of purely womanly characteristics, is wedded to a sensual, brutish nature like this. With a self-renunciation, of which the unconsciousness of merit is the most wonderful part, she immediately devotes herself to the task of placing herself on a sympathetic level with her husband; to the extinguishment of every shining charm; the remolding of every attractive trait; the assimilation of every fiber of her nature to the low and groveling type of the man. The

ideal woman is utterly buried in the coarse reality of her life and duty. But behold the wonderful transformation. These gentle feminine graces and aspirations, so lost, so buried, reappear by slow growth, and grotesque apotheosis, in the sluggish nature of the man. He will gain heaven at last, mounting by the sure stepping-stones of that devoted woman's sacrifices. And so, as ever, Woman bears the Christ.

But Mrs. Moss was not one of these. She had the true womanly gift of spiritual healing, but not so could it be applied. In these days of inactivity, and of being brought face to face with death, Moses began to bethink himself of his lost chances. He had laughed at "mother" often for going to church so persistently; had scolded sometimes, because she "wasted" so much time reading; had even felt that if she had been less occupied with her reading, and the thoughts it engendered, and more ready to listen to his story-telling and gossip, that he should have gone less frequently to the tavern. But now, looking back upon the miserable, fruitless past, he began to wish that he had staid at home more, and read with mother. To be sure, there had always been such a brood of children about, that the home had had few charms; but, in a vague, regretful way, he saw that while he had had a man's freedom, a man's superior position and chances, and mother had been tied at home with these children, and kept constantly a slave to their daily and nightly wants, it was, after all, she, and not he, who was the strongest and bravest to meet "life, death and that vast hereafter," which, even to Moses' darkened mind, began to loom up with fearful certainty and distinctness. It seemed all wrong, all puzzling, all mysterious, and somehow unjust, to Moses. And when he had got so far, his old worn body set up its protest, and he grew peevish again, and just then the doctor called.

"H'm!" said the doctor, feeling his pulse and taking a survey of his eye and skin. "Not much better. How—does—the—medicine—affect you?"

"Don't do me a bit of good, as I can see, doctor. I tell ye, doctor, I've got to have something warming before I shall get over this."

"Pepper-tea. Pepper-tea is warming, A little pepper-tea, not too strong, might do you good."

Moses swore a little. "Pepper-tea," he exclaimed, scornfully. "I tell you, doctor, it's whiskey I want, or gin. If I could get a good horn of either, I should be right up in a minute."

The doctor whistled, in that low, meditative way of his. "When you get able to go to the tavern after it, it will be time enough for you to take the whiskey. Guess I'd let it alone just now."

Mrs. Moss came in, and they consulted about various minor details of the case. Then the doctor rose to go.

"Doctor," said Moses, in a feeble, whining voice—it was his final appeal, "*can't* I have just a drop of something warming?"

"Ho—ho," said the doctor. "When—old—Squire McIntyre—was a farming it—on—the—Nightingale—Place, he was mighty—tight—with his hired men. Didn't give 'em half enough to eat. They complained to the neighbors, and some of the old farmers about went to the squire, and recommended him to be a little more liberal. 'Men—a—mowing,' they said, 'wanted a—little—something—*warm*—for *breakfast*.' 'Cod!' said the old squire, 'I don't know what the devil they want hotter than boiling hot porridge.' You can have all the boiling—hot—porridge—you want."

The doctor shut the door, and there was no more to be said.

Mrs. Moss was going about her kitchen with a nervous

jerk in her motions, and a nervous flicker in her eyes, which the doctor was not slow to notice.

He was not in a hurry, so he sat down and began to talk with the woman. The doctor had not spent fifty years prying into the causes of things, without finding out the reason that women are usually more talkative than men. With their fine nervous organisms and sensitive feelings, and with the constant strain, and wear and tear, to which the peculiarities of their life subject their delicate susceptibilities, they would die if they had not a vent for the nervousness and irritation engendered. The doctor knew very well that a good talk would do Mrs. Moss good; and knowing all the burdens which she had to bear in these days, he considered it a professional duty to stop and give her a chance to have it.

"How is Theodore getting along?" asked the doctor.

"Theodore is doing first rate," said his mother, proudly. "There ain't a better boy in the county, if I do say it. He's a regular staver for business. He's up every morning at daybreak, makes the fire, gets the kettle on before I get up, has his breakfast by sunrise, and is off. He takes good care of his money, too. He has been a rough boy, and maybe he hain't got quite so smooth an outside, yet, as some on 'em, but he's true blue for all that."

"I am glad to hear it," said the doctor, "glad to hear it. I've always thought well of Theodore, ever since he went to the fair for me. He did well then, did—well. I hope he will always do as well."

"If there didn't nothing trouble me more than Theodore," said Mrs. Moss, "I shouldn't have much to worry about. But here's Moses; he is twice the care the boy is."

"Moses is some sick, but I hope he'll be around again in a week or two. He is pretty peevish, and I expect is some care; but he's going to get over it; going—to get—over—it."

"Yes, and then the first thing he'll do will be to go right back to that tavern and fill himself up again. Doctor, you know I ain't one of the complaining kind. I never have been. But—*you know*."

"Yes, I know, I know," with that pensive inflection which gave the words a thousand-fold more meaning than they possessed of themselves. "I *suppose* I know something what it is to live with a man that drinks. You've borne your burden so far, Rachel; you ain't going to break down now, are you?"

"No," said Rachel, a dry, choking sob in her voice. "I ain't a-going to break down. I ain't so strong as I used to be before I had all this brood of children, but I shall hold out a while longer yet. But I wish every drop of liquor in the world was burnt up."

"You are over tired now, Rachel. As you say, you are not so strong as you used to be. After a few years you'll feel better than you do just now. It's the turning point with you. You'll get beyond that, and then you'll get settled again. You must remember that, and not give way too much. As for the liquor, the liquor isn't to blame. Liquor is good enough in its place; good for medicine; good in cases of great fatigue or unusual exposure. It's the men that are to blame. The liquor isn't to blame, but some men are awfully depraved in the use of it. I've seen women that were pretty hard drinkers, but it isn't natural to them. They are fine grained, and they can't stand it. They burn out too fast. But men will drink, if their animal passions crave drink, and all the Maine laws in the world won't stop them. People have got to stop fighting the liquor, and fight the brutal natures of the men instead. Moses ought to go to meeting; he ought to read the papers more. If Theodore would subscribe for some good political paper for a year, and you would read it aloud to him—the children have got out of

the way now, so you can—it would keep him away from the tavern, more than the Maine law. Kind o' court him up again, Rachel. Make him feel that he don't want to go anywhere, where you can't go, too. Women can do that; they know how; God made 'em the way he did on purpose for the business. Kind o' court him up a little, now that you are getting old together, and Moses will see better days than he has ever seen. Never'll be so strong again, but he'll be a better man.

“Above all, Rachel, don't you get discouraged. When a *woman* gets discouraged, the house goes to ruin, sure enough.”

There were tears in Rachel's eyes, and she wiped her hands out of the dishwater and stepped forward and shook hands with the doctor.

“Doctor,” she said, “I'll remember every word of this, and it shall all be done. Seems as if I never got to any sore pinch in my life, but what you stood ready to help me out. I can't pay you for it, but God will.”

The doctor dropped his head, and left the house without another word; but very deep down in his heart some tender feeling, for a moment, stirred.

“I'm a dry old stick,” he said to himself. “Odd, maybe; the young folks all seem to think I'm odd; but I *do*—*believe*—there are two—or—three—*old—women* that set by me, and would miss me if I was gone.”

Then the doctor, sitting behind the old gray, the reins hanging loose in his hands, and riding away over the wind-swept hills, meditated and wondered. Meditated more and wondered less than he had five-and-thirty years ago, when he had first ridden about from one to another of these low, gray farm houses; but still meditated and wondered. The doctor said to himself:

“When a female bird is sitting on her eggs, the male bird goes abroad in search of food for her, and, coming

home, sits on a twig hard by the nest, and sings his best song. When a woman is having her children and bringing them up, her husband, when his day's work is done, as like as any way, goes to a tavern or a worse place, to get rid of his time. She can't cultivate her mind, and he won't, and their old age is likely to be a pretty barren one. If men hadn't got such a notion of shutting women out of all kinds of business in which they are themselves engaged, it would be better for them, in my opinion. It isn't profitable for men to be alone now, more than it was in the Garden. If they are alone in their business, they grow coarse and selfish, and dishonest; they run wild with speculation, and, very likely, in the end turn out defaulters. If they are alone in their places of recreation, they sink from ale-houses and billiard-saloons to houses whose steps, true enough, lay hold on hell.

“The Lord — knew — just — what — kind — of an animal — he had made — when he said, ‘*It — isn't — good — for man — to be alone.*’”

M

XXV.

THE FIRST LAW OF COURTSHIP.

Mr. Gladstone was not conscious of any particular change in his intellectual convictions, resulting from that evening's conversation; and yet, in a way which he scarcely recognized, there was a certain expansion of his views, and a letting in of light, upon some dingy, cob-webbed corners of his mind, which was very salutary.

He had always felt a peculiar and tender reverence for good women; but it had never occurred to him that a broad and thorough intellectual training would add very much to their worth. He had rather thought of it as something which women did not need; were above, he might have said, had no woman challenged his combativeness, by asserting that fact before him. And, as I said, he was not conscious of any change in his opinions now; but a single practical result told the story. From that time forth, he never again thought of Lillian Meredith as his wife.

But Miss Ridalhuber? He had not quite settled his doubts yet, as to whether that lady was capable of a strong and pure affection.

Meantime, a little incident occurred. At the close of a hot June day, Reba called at the office to return a parcel of papers. A little weariness, a good deal of lassitude, consequent upon the sudden coming of summer, gave a droop to her eyelids, and a pliancy to her form, which had a certain tender grace of their own, and which caught at once Mr. Gladstone's eye.

"Have you anything more for me?" she asked.

He hesitated a moment, looking at her with honest eyes of sympathy and kindness.

"No," he said, "not this evening. There was a little matter, but you look too tired. Will you take these flowers? A lady brought them to me; but they are wasting their fragrance on my masculine robustness. I think they will revive you."

The kind tones touched a tender place in Reba's heart, and she looked up to him with eyes full of gratitude and appreciation.

"Thank you," she said, frankly, and then her eyes dropped.

That sudden suffusion of her face with light, had been a revelation to Mr. Gladstone; and he was feasting his eyes upon it in a way which called the color to her cheek. He held out his hand to her, to say good-by, and the light trembling touch of hers lingered in his memory, a twin token to the eyes' soft shining, for many an hour afterward.

"That was true feeling, tenderly expressed," he said. "I would like to win that look into her face again."

Reba was a little provoked at herself as she walked home. "How dared he be so gentle," she said to herself, "and yet it was only courteous. And I was so foolish as to be touched by it, and—I do not know—but I am afraid, to show it, too. I must be more cautious in future."

It is a curious study to watch how simply and certainly two hearts, naturally akin, if all adventitious barriers are removed, will find each other out.

Mr. Gladstone called on Miss Ridalhuber that very evening. He had no thought, as he walked down the flowery lane which led to the parsonage, but he should find her just as fascinating as ever. She was, in truth, looking very sweetly; but the peculiar charm of her manner had somehow vanished. Her tones were just as melodious, but his heart-strings did not once thrill under her sorcery. He had the taste of true honey on his

tongue, and no counterfeit sweetness could deceive him now.

When he bade her good evening there was not a trace in his manner of that impressment on which she had built so many hopes. He bowed his adieux, and walked away as coolly as he might have from the banker's desk where he had just deposited his day's overplus.

Miss Ridalhuber felt it, and said to herself: "It is, then, only a flirtation." Ten minutes later she observed to Mrs. Evans:

"Élise, dear, how many days does rural etiquette allow us, before returning Mrs. Linscott's visit?"

"It is quite optional with us," said Mrs. Evans, "to go, or not. It is twelve or fifteen miles to Jericho."

"Ah!" said Miss Ridalhuber, a little regretfully.

"But, then, if you would like, we may go all the same."

"I think not," said Miss Ridalhuber. "It would be taking too much trouble. Élise, is Mr. Evans going to have a picnic for the Sabbath School, on the Fourth of July?"

"It would be delightful. I'll propose it to him at once."

"Oh! not from me. I thought country people always did celebrate that anniversary in some such way."

The Sabbath School picnic was settled upon, and Mr. Linscott was invited to be present and deliver the address. Miss Ridalhuber, you see, was an industrious creature, and wasted no time in vain regrets.

Meantime, Mr. Gladstone was pursuing that resolve of his, to win back the tender look into Rebecca's face. He had no serious ulterior intention in the matter. He did not speculate about her; his dreams were confined to the single point of recalling her face as she looked up, with tender, beaming eyes, to thank him for the flowers. Yet, as he met her, from day to day, there was an insidious tenderness and delicacy in his manner toward her, which

he had not often brought to bear upon any other woman. His voice softened when he addressed her; his look grew tenderer when it rested upon her, as it often did, till the color involuntarily deepened on her cheek; and his very fingers dropped caresses, as they touched the dainty manuscripts which she brought him.

In all the world, I think, there is not a more selfish being than a man, when he takes this kind of light, inconsequent fancy for a woman. A coquette, even, is less despicable; because, when the weak practices upon the strong, we confess to a kind of retributive justice; but when the strong takes advantage of the weak, there is meanness added to wrong-doing. The man knows—do not ask me how—a thousand and one tender arts of which she is innocent; and he uses them all without scruple, to entrap her into some manifestation of feeling, and then, when he has found how her face lights up with the love-smile on it—that is all he wanted to know. He trims his sail to other breezes, and is off, leaving her to lay the spirits he has raised as best she may.

Abraham Gladstone was not a man to do this thing in any other than a thoughtless way. Yet, if you had asked him, at that stage of the acquaintance, what were his intentions toward Rebecca, he would have answered you at once, and honestly, that he had no intentions—none whatever. If Rebecca had yielded to his advances, as nine out of ten untried women would have done; opening her heart as naturally and as purely to his smiles, as a flower opens to the sun, he would have some day been a little shocked, and then her fate would have hung upon a thread. If he had had nothing better to do at that moment, and the fates had been propitious, he might have made genuine love to her; otherwise, he would have kissed his finger-tips and said good-by to her so airily, that she would have loved him for the grace of his departure, if for nothing more.

But Rebecca, whatever her personal feelings may have been, had very good reasons for not encouraging Mr. Gladstone's demonstrativeness. The more he grew appreciative, the more she grew coy, till at last Mr. Gladstone became very sensible that, while she ever accepted his kindness most graciously, there was a certain line which he could never pass without suddenly letting in upon himself a very chilling draught.

And yet, he had once seen the way straight down to her heart. Mr. Gladstone began to feel as if the happiness of his lifetime depended upon his catching again that star-beam, and following it to its source. From calling at Mr. Darrell's on business, it came to his calling for pleasure; instead of bringing always law papers, he brought sometimes literary papers; till Mrs. Darrell, with a woman's quick perceptions, saw plainly that he had commenced to lay regular siege to Rebecca's heart. But between the two women a singular confidence existed. Since the night of their long conversation concerning Rebecca's history—a conversation which, however free it had been concerning general outlines, had included no details of name or place—not a word had been spoken on the subject, except, perhaps, an indirect allusion now and then. Rebecca was not a woman who could be talkative about her own experiences, whether they were sad or joyful. The deepest feelings of her heart ever concealed themselves, and Mrs. Darrell, with true respect and noble trust, took with love whatever her friend offered, and asked for nothing more. Therefore, though she had an intense interest to know Rebecca's feelings, she never, by word or deed, alluded to the circumstance of Mr. Gladstone's attentions, or remarked his coming as if it were at all out of the common way.

And Rebecca herself—she had had, as we know, a little prejudice against Mr. Gladstone, during her early acquaint-

ance with him; and this, when she had first agreed to act as his copyist, it had been her firm and rather perverse determination to retain. But, somehow, during the first week of her engagement, this had imperceptibly vanished, till now not a vestige of it remained. He was an honest man, a courteous and refined gentleman. She respected him thoroughly. So much before her fears were startled. When he surprised her with his kindness, her woman's heart gave a little flutter, but she said to it: "Be still, fond thing; you are dead, and have no right to be stirring in your deep-made grave." She took out the invisible weeds which she had worn years ago, and draped herself with them, and Mr. Gladstone felt them. When Mr. Gladstone commenced to visit her as a suitor, she knew it very well, but she said in scorn of her old self, "*my* heart waken to the tread of a lover again! It is absurd." But it just then occurred to her how differently she had felt, when she knew, by that unerring insight which the bitter experiences of the past had taught her, that Mr. Linscott had leanings toward her. Then she had said, and with calm pulses, too, that she should never marry. Now, alas!

I think, at this stage, she must have had a good cry. I do not know how a woman, so tried and perplexed, could maintain her outward equilibrium and composure as she did, without that secret relief. And even then, she had not quite strength to put her heel upon this new tenderness and crush it, as something within her told her she ought; but just went on, day after day, taking up, when Mr. Gladstone's back was turned, the manna his presence had dropped, and feeding on it in secret. Yet, all the time persuading herself—this weak, fond woman—that she was not going to allow him to address her, or herself to feel any tenderness for him.

In this life, who can tell what is fate and what is free-will? how much we do for ourselves, and how much the

power that ordains our lot does for us? Blessed thought, that our lives and His are so closely interwoven that only Infinite Wisdom can mark the dividing line.

Wyndham possessed unusual facilities for picnicing. Within easy access of the town, but still sufficiently remote for solitude and freedom, a tiny lake, blue as the sky, lay nestled among the meditative hills. Ancient woodlands stretched down the neighboring hill-slopes, and peeped over the very brim into the shining mirror below; a vanity of which ancient trees are not the sole example among ancient things. Here birds sang and squirrels chattered, quite undisturbed, except that occasionally during the summer social parties were formed at the village, who drove out in great wagons and spent the day in a frolic under the green boughs of the venerable maples and hickories. At last, public liberality bestirred itself, and cleared up an acre or so of underbrush, and laid a platform for dancing, and built a small rostrum for the accommodation of the American Eagle, or his representative, on the Fourth of July and thereafter the picnic ground became as much a public institution as the bank or the meeting-house.

Thither, on this Fourth of July, which we are about to celebrate, the Sabbath school of Wyndham, accompanied by the grave and reverend seigniors of the town, and the scarcely less grave and reverend juniors—for, in Yankee towns it is generally the young people who lead—repaired in dignified, yet jocund procession, to mingle recreation with historic memories and grandiloquent prophecies.

A great many people manage to enjoy themselves in the world, but none, that I know of, with such a solemn, responsible sense of the fact, as New Englanders. A picnic in New England, at which religion and politics and temperance, and that highly necessary and important

espionage of public morals, which the irreverent call scandal, were not the chief and prominent interests maintained, would be an anomaly. Make sure of these things, then slip in your little amusements here and there, as you find occasion. You have then an entertainment which may or may not prove a recreation and a pleasure, but which, at all events, upholds the reputation of your town for morals.

The day of this especial picnic was fair and fine as could be desired. A cloudless sky; a warm, though not oppressive sun; and a quiet breeze curling, but not crisping, the shimmering surface of the pond. The grove, cool and fresh as purest dew and balmiest air could make it, but purged now of any dampness by the fervent sun, blossomed out suddenly at a certain hour of the midday with some scores of grave, puritanical little folks, mostly in white muslin, with green wreaths and pink roses on their hats, while a dignified and orderly assemblage of their elders kept due watch and ward over them; they, in their turn, being well kept and guarded by two or three clergymen in solemn sable, and no end of deacons in black coats, and faces of most business-like length and importance.

There was a prayer by the Rev. Mark Evans; then a hymn, then an address to the Sabbath School, by the Rev. Jeremiah Linscott. Such a stirring, bracing, well seasoned discourse as it was; eminently fitted to impress upon the minds of those small sinners the amount of evil there was in the world, and which it would be their solemn duty, when they should have grown into the stature and places of their progenitors and present guardians, to root out, to castigate, to extirpate utterly from the face of the earth. The responsibility of the temporal and eternal welfare of unnumbered thousands of their fellow-men, was laid upon their young shoulders; and if they took any good of the

strawberries and cream, and gingerbread, and sponge-cakes, which came after, it must have been the fault of tough consciences, and not of the Rev. Jeremiah Linscott's oratory. The school-master then read the Declaration of Independence; after which Mr. Gladstone represented the politics of the day in a rather more hopeful and less overpowering strain; and after him were to follow hymns, and still other speeches—one, by a celebrated temperance lecturer, being a marked feature of the day.

But, at the close of his address, Mr. Gladstone descended from the platform, and making his way to Rebecca, who stood on the edge of the crowd, drew her hand into his arm, and said, gayly:

"I'm done with duty for to-day. Let us get away from this crowd, and stroll off into the woods. I promise you a whole handful of wild flowers, before we get back."

Reba hesitated a moment; but his manner was earnest, and the woods looked very cool and inviting, and she finally yielded.

"I wonder if I shall offend you," said Mr. Gladstone, "by giving free ventilation to my opinion of Mr. Linscott?"

Reba smiled; and he, taking that for his answer, went on:

"As a man, he is all very well; a good citizen, and I'd vote for him, for High Sheriff, as soon as any man I know of. But, as a minister of the Gospel of Love, as a spiritual leader and guide to us poor sinners, sunk as we are already, in the grossness of materialism, that does seem to me too much of a joke."

"But Mr. Linscott has a great many good points, especially when you consider the kind of people he is set over; and we cannot expect all the virtues and graces, you know, for six hundred a year."

"Oh, you may ease your conscience that way, if you like; but I prefer to own to the gossip, and then speak the truth. I do protest against any man who has not the glim-

mer of a spark of spiritual insight or illumination, but who is, if possible, harder and more material than his neighbors, setting himself up for a spiritual guide. I don't believe God ever called such a man as Mr. Linscott to the pulpit; a man so materialistic in his views, so full of old traditions, so perfectly incapable of any broad, progressive views of truth; and I do think that he hinders the good work of Christianizing the world more than he helps it. If ever I feel like taking the field against all creeds and dogmas, and restricted forms of belief whatever, it is after I have listened to him for an hour, pelting his audience with old dry husks of doctrine, and never once giving them a grain of anything that could, by any means, be made nutritious to the human soul."

"When you feel in that way, Mr. Gladstone, you should go back to the simple power and beauty of Christ's teachings: the wheat fields, the lilies, the fowls of the air, the flocks of the fields, the expanse of the sea, the purity of the mountains; these will soften and heal your pugilistic propensities, and lift you into a region entirely above, and transcending them."

"Yes, I know it, my friend; I know it. But why don't the church present these things more; the quiet, simple truths, the beautiful and impressive sacraments, and leave out the dogmas. We poor hunted, sin-chased men, would get set free from our tempters a great deal quicker. My friend, do you know that I have leanings toward the Roman Church, on that very account?"

Reba smiled. "The Church of God," she said, "mine eye seeth it now; its firm and huge foundations, laid deep in the Judaic heart, among the iron and granite of the old Roman and Gothic worlds; its walls rising broad and vast through the middle age, columned with the figures of saints and apostles, and cemented with the blood of martyrs; its grand over-arching roof springing light, but

firm and sparkling, from the civilization of to-day; its dome, ah, its dome! no eye hath seen that miracle of glory. It dwelleth yet in the heavens, in the vision of the Great Architect, who buildeth slowly, through all time; but, in the fullness of the ages, it shall descend, glowing and perfect, to crown the whole—a fitting coronal.”

Mr. Gladstone was looking into her face, his eye kindling with enthusiasm caught from hers. They were sitting upon a great ledge, which overlooked the water, green mosses under their feet, swaying boughs over their heads. A silence deepened between them, as eloquent as it was dangerous.

“Reba,” said Mr. Gladstone, at length, “I have been reading Faust recently, and really, Mrs. Darrell’s criticisms have opened my eyes to new meanings in it. I yield a good deal of my former prejudice; or, rather, I begin to see the heart and meaning of the old woman-worship in a new light.”

“I think,” said Reba, “I was never fully impressed with the character of Margaret, until I saw it in opera. I am, or was, perhaps, peculiarly susceptible to musical impressions; but the first time I saw Faust, I sat entranced—not with the music; other operas far surpass it in vocal and orchestral effects; but just with the character of that pure-hearted, simple-minded German maiden; its divine power, its fatal human weakness; the one set all astray, as the power of woman mostly is, in this world; the other in the direct line of her swift, on-coming fate. There was a naturalness and a terribleness about it, which utterly overcame me.”

They wandered off, then, into a discursive chat, which grew to have its more or less personal side; a comparison of tastes, and likings, and impressions, which deepened their mutual acquaintance, and disclosed a harmony that was in itself a snare.

Coming back to the picnic ground, they found the tables spread, and the usual busy, buzzing groups, surrounding them.

Seating Reba in the shade of a great oak, at a little distance from the tables, Mr. Gladstone procured refreshments, and the two were discussing them with the usual chat.

"How well the grounds are looking, and people seem to be enjoying themselves hugely. For a picnic gotten up on so short notice, it is, I think, a decided success."

"Mrs. Evans gives out," said Reba, "that we owe all this pleasure to Miss Ridalhuber's love of children and interest in Sabbath schools."

The remark was pointed by a sly glance of amusement across the tables, where Mr. Linscott was devoting himself to the young lady in question with his usual energy.

Mr. Gladstone was quietly appreciative.

"Behold the malice of women," said he, "shining as steel, fine as a needle point, and as piercing. I wonder if Mrs. Darrell will put that quality of women into her book?"

"I disown the malice," said Rebecca; "simply these ways in which good society trains up its virtuous daughters, and the innocent little transparencies of fiction by which they strive to make art conceal art, amuse me. Besides, you forget that I have an interest in Mr. Linscott."

"Ah! yes. Shall I confess to you that I once was quite seriously attracted by Miss Ridalhuber? She is a fine girl, Miss Reba, spite of that dainty bit of detraction."

"Mr. Gladstone, we shall quarrel in five minutes, if you continue your accusations. I do not deny Miss Ridalhuber's virtues. Only—"

"Only you are a woman. To tell the truth, I am delighting myself with finding that, spite of the rather decided leaning which you manifest toward what Mr. Linscott

would certainly call 'strong-mindedness,' you yet have not soared altogether above the dear, charming, human foibles of the sex. You may prove the women all angels a thousand times over if you please, so that you leave them at last — women."

Mr. Gladstone was in his best spirits, and there was something in his tones and the glance of his eyes, or else, who knows, something in her own heart, which made Reba fix her eyes upon the ground, while a dainty color crept up her cheek.

In that little pause, the words of a group of young ladies, who were standing on the other side of the tree, came distinctly to their ears.

"How devoted Mr. Gladstone is to *that* Miss March. It grows to look serious."

"Oh!" said Miss Lillie Meredith, with that fine, cool scorn which women manage so well:

"Oh! he is only flirting. I know Mr. Gladstone very well, and he would never think of marrying — *her*."

Mr. Gladstone looked up at Reba with simply a smile at this weighty pronunciamiento concerning his intentions, and was shocked to see her change color most painfully, while her eyes were filled with a look of anguish which he could not at all comprehend. Before he could speak, however, Mr. Darrell passed them, and Reba, with a bow to Mr. Gladstone, took his arm and walked away.

"It is no wonder," he said to himself, "that she should have been wounded by that abominable speech. I will see her again by and by, and make it right with her."

With that, he joined a group of ladies near him, and helped them to keep up the light, nonsensical chat of the hour; waiting till Mr. Linscott should release Miss Ridalhuber, so that he might have a moment with her himself.

But Mr. Linscott was very much in earnest. No sooner had Miss Ridalhuber finished her dish of strawberries and

cream, than he begged her to walk with him along the beach, with which request she very gracefully complied.

"How sweetly this bright company lights up these solemn, old woods," said Miss Ridalhuber. "I can fancy how wild and deserted the place will seem to-morrow, when we are all gone."

"Ah! yes," said Mr. Linscott, with a peculiarly tender significance of tone, which had an odd effect, when one thought of his sharp, business-like face, and his stiff, white neckcloth.

"Ah! yes. My dear Miss Ridalhuber, the presence of woman refines the most savage wilderness, in a way which we coarser beings of the male sex can admire, but never account for. Imagine for a moment that this party was composed entirely of men, and how instantly the scene would lose its enchantment."

Miss Ridalhuber looked her appreciation, but replied in a modest, deprecatory tone:

"Part of that effect is, I think, owing to the more graceful and brightly colored dress of woman. Gentlemen make themselves—shall I say it—hideous, by the fashion of their garments."

"Ah! my dear young lady, the garments correspond but too well with the creatures that wear them. Men are too generally 'of the earth, earthy.' Woman was created to be our solace, our refuge, our guiding star, our sweet remembrancer of heaven, in this cold and selfish world. It is well she wears her honors meekly, for if she chose to flaunt them in our faces, we should be compelled to yield her that supremacy which now she so beautifully deprecates."

"Oh! the modesty of women is their chief ornament, I think. The apostle expresses it so beautifully in that passage concerning 'the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.' "

Let us take notice that Miss Ridalhuber, at that moment, was a marvel of frizzes, and braids, and dangles, and "gold and pearls, and costly array," she having already caught the secret of Mr. Linscott's weakness for a dazzling, effective style of dress.

"Yes, women owe much to Christianity; or, perhaps I ought rather to say, that the relation subsisting between the two is a most tender and beautiful one. Every minister knows that his most appreciative listeners are among the women of his congregation; and I have administered the Lord's Supper more than once when, I am grieved and pained to say, the women were so much in the preponderance, that I could scarcely blame a scoffer who once remarked that there were hardly men enough present to distribute the elements to the women."

"The weakness of women impels them to cling to some strong, religious support, while men, in their conscious strength and self-sufficiency, are less leaning."

"Ah, Miss Ridalhuber, only men are conscious how deceitful is that appearance of strength and self-sufficiency; how the heart of man ever longs for a sure and safe refuge in the love of gentle woman; how much of the strength that conquers the world, in fact, has its spring in the tender and faithful heart of the household angel. More precious, far, than all the empty plaudits of the world, are the smiles of joy and tears of sympathy of such an one."

Miss Ridalhuber was walking with downcast eyes. She leaned a little more tremblingly upon Mr. Linscott's arm; and, thus encouraged, the momentous question was speedily murmured in her ear:

"Azarian, my heart and life are very lonely. Can you bless me with your love? Will you be the divinity of my home; my dearly loved and tenderly cherished wife?"

It would be cruel to record, *verbatim*, the reply of so modest and shrinking a creature as Miss Ridalhuber. It

is sufficient to say that it was a very gently spoken, and a very pleasing one.

The reader will remember another conversation of Mr. Linscott, with a woman toward whom he was tenderly attracted. The little queries naturally suggest themselves: In which was he most truthful? In which most manly?

Alas! alas! for the aspirations of such men as Mr. Linscott. Since the world began, there *never was* devised but *one* way of making love.

Love is blind, you say. Ah! yes; but he is divine, and the gods know all without seeing.

XXVI.

JOEL'S SECRET.

One showery August evening, just as Mr. Gladstone was preparing to leave his office, the door was cautiously opened, and Joel entered, looking a little sheepish, and casting a furtive glance into every corner of the room.

"Good evenin', sir," said Joel. "Alone, be ye? Glad on't. I've got something particular to say."

"Ah! indeed," said Mr. Gladstone. "Is it professional, Joel?"

"I 'speck so. Leastwise, you can tell that better'n I can. 'Tain't no quarrel, Mr. Gladstone; 'tain't no quarrel. You know I never quarrel; I go in agin quarrelin'."

"Yes, Joel; I'm aware that you are a man of peace."

"Yes, sir; nor I don't want to stir up no quarrel. I've had it on my mind a good while to tell you; but, ye see, I didn't want to make no fuss. I asked Nancy about it, (ye see, Nancy was a kind o' knowing to it, as I may say,) but she advised me to hold my tongue. "'Tain't likely there'll any good come of it,' says she, 'cept it's a quarrel, and you may get yourself into a scrape. You'd better hold your tongue, Joel.' You know Nancy's one of the faint-hearted sort, anyhow. But there's my Lucretia, she's of a different stripe. When I told her about it, pretty soon after we was married, says she, right off: 'Joel, do you go straight to Mr. Gladstone, and tell him all about it. It won't make no fuss, 'thout there's something wrong, and then there ought to be a fuss made. Lord, I should like to know,' says she, 'how we could live in this world, if somebody didn't make a fuss, and keep making a fuss, too, about all the time. As for getting yourself into trouble,' says she, 'don't you be afeard. *You* hain't been a-doin'

nothin' that the law can take hold of,' says she. That's the difference in women, ye see. Well, I've been a meanin' to get over here 'n tell ye, for a good while, but I've been kind o' busy, and I never hev till now."

"Very well," said Mr. Gladstone, "I'm quite ready to hear it. You hav'n't told me, yet, what it's about."

"Well, I'm just comin' to that," said Joel, luminously.

With that he drew his chair a hitch nearer Mr. Gladstone, and then went and looked out of the window to see that nobody was listening. Being satisfied of this, he came back, leaned over to Mr. Gladstone in an earnest, confidential way, and commenced his story.

As he proceeded, Mr. Gladstone's indifference suddenly vanished, and he listened with the gravest attention.

"Joel," he said, when the latter had finished, "you did very rightly in coming to me with this. Your communication may lead to something, and it may not; but, at any rate, I think it is best to take it down in writing. I would like to have it by me, to refer to; and then, if you should die, or move away, this writing might be used as evidence, if it were necessary."

Joel seemed a little frightened, but acquiesced, and Mr. Gladstone drew up a formal affidavit, which Joel duly affirmed, and signed, in the proper legal manner.

"Joel," said Mr. Gladstone, when they had finished, "I am deeply grateful to you for your discretion in this matter. It is late in the day to utter a caution about it, but I trust you will be careful not to mention this to any person."

"Oh! sartain, sir; sartain. I wouldn't tell nobody on't for nothin'."

"And your wife?"

"Oh, Creeshy won't say nothin'. Leastwise she might let out a hint sometime, but 'twouldn't be nothin' that nobody could make anything of. Creeshy'll keep dark, if I tell her to."

"And Nancy? It seems very strange that two or three people should have known this thing so long, and it never got out at all."

"Well, you know-I ain't very quick at supposing things; and it was a good while afore I thought anything wrong of it. But, arter a while, it kind o' come to me, as how it was queer, to say the least on't; and then I told Nancy, and she was kind o' frightened, and said maybe 'twant anything, anyway. And I never should ha' thought it really was *worth* a-tellin' on, if 't'adn't been for Creeshy. You needn't be none afraid of Nancy; she won't never think on't again, like as not, if nobody don't say nothin' to her."

"Joel," said Mr. Gladstone, a little doubtingly, "I feel as if you had done me a service, for which I'd like to pay you," and he took out his porte-monnaie, keeping his eye all the time on Joel's face.

"Lord! Mr. Gladstone," said Joel, in high scorn, "I don't want yer money. I hain't done nothin'. Go-'long!'" and with that explosive dismissal of the subject, he rushed out of the office, and slammed the door after him.

Mr. Gladstone's smile relapsed into a deeply thoughtful expression of countenance. He sat for five minutes without moving. At the end of that time his eyes grew tender, and he drew a long and feeling sigh. Then he rose, and closed his office, and walked thoughtfully down the street.

Joel, meanwhile, stopped at the store, to do a little errand, and then walked home, muttering to himself, in a tone that was not at all ill-natured:

"Humph! Offerin' me money. Me!—that had the bringin' up of him—the little varmint!"

At that moment Abraham Gladstone was, to Joel's eyes, only a lad in his teens, over whom Joel, a stout young farmer, exercised a kind of friendly oversight and authority. With all the difference in circumstance, the old tie

held good; and because love is never more nor less than love, however seasons change, Joel still spurned the idea of taking money from his old friend.

The next morning there was a great stir in the doctor's kitchen. Mr. Linscott and his mother were coming over from Jericho, to spend a day or two—Mr. Linscott was assiduously cultivating all his Wyndham acquaintances now—and upon Creeshy's shoulders rested the onerous duty of making preparations for them.

"Joel," said Lucretia, sharply, as that worthy entered with a great armful of oven wood, "I should like to know the reason that we never have no eggs? It is full two weeks since you've brought in a single egg. After all the fuss you made all winter, about keepin' over hens, I should think we might have an egg, now and then, as well as our neighbors. Six hens about the place, to say nothing of chickens, and not an egg to use."

"One on 'em 's a cockerel," said Joel, coolly, "and—"

"That don't make no difference," said Creeshy, spitefully. "It ain't nothing at all to the purpose, if they was all roosters. There ought to be some eggs in the house—five hens around a place, and no eggs. A pretty how d'y' do!"

"Cart wheel run over one on 'em, t'other day," said Joel, "and—"

"I don't want to hear none o' your excuses. A man'll set and make excuses all day long, if you'll let him. It is your business to see that them hens lay. I say that, with a grist of hens about a place, and no eggs in the house, and you a-eating the doctor's vittles, and a-taking his money every day of your life, it ain't no better'n stealin'."

"Two of 'em's a-settin'," said Joel, "and—"

"Two of 'em's a-settin'! I should like to know what hens are a-settin' for in August. I expect the doctor's

a-countin' on br'iled chicken for breakfast, about Thanksgiving time. That's all the sense he's got. When folks don't marry, I do b'lieve they get to be fools. What on airth are t'other two hens a-doin'?"

"'Spect they're a-laying to 'em," said Joel.

The doctor, who had passed through the kitchen at the beginning of this friendly chat, now re-appeared at the door.

"Joel," said he, "how many chickens do you expect old Blue-top to hatch?"

"Not any," said Joel.

"She's sitting on the barn floor with twenty-seven eggs under her, and not so much as a wisp of straw for a nest. She's a—little—too—ambitious, I'm afraid, and needs regulating."

"More fool she," said Joel. "Ye see, doctor, what, with all these showers, the hay has bothered me so, that I hain't thought a word about the hens for a fortnight. Creeshy, if you'll just lift up that pan, right by your hand, you'll find a couple o' dozen of eggs, that I fetched home from the store, last night. I 'spected ye'd be a-wanting eggs to-day, but I reckoned 'twould do ye good to hev yer blow out."

Joel saw a vision of a rolling-pin in mid-air, and dodged out of the door with an explosive laugh and cackle.

"Guess I got the better on her that time," said he to the doctor.

"Ye see," said Lucretia, apologetically, to Miss Joanna, who came into the kitchen just in time to witness the conclusion of hostilities, "I shouldn't care nothin' about old Mrs. Linscott. She's particular, to be sure, but then I ain't afraid to compare cookin' with her, any time. I know all about her. But that Miss Ridalhuber'll be here to tea, and these city folks do put me out so."

"I do not think it is worth while to be troubled much

about Miss Ridalhuber," said Miss Joanna. "Her lover will be here, you know, and people in love are not supposed to care much for good eating."

"Oh, that ain't neither here nor there, with Miss Ridalhuber," said Lucretia. "I watched 'em at the picnic, and I tell you she ain't none too much took up with Mr. Linscott. If she could have got the lawyer, she'd have given the minister the go-by quick enough."

"Oh, Lucretia, you should not judge people so harshly. I am sure Mr. Gladstone has been very attentive to Miss Ridalhuber, and if she had fancied him, she had no reason, that I know of, for thinking that she couldn't win him."

"Humph," said Lucretia, "you ain't one of Miss Ridalhuber's kind, and never was. She knows what she is about. Not but what she's good enough for Mr. Linscott. He needs somebody that is sly and catty, and can pull the wool over his eyes, and he will get it in her."

There was some farther chat about kitchen mysteries, and then Miss Joanna went out into the garden to gather berries for tea.

In her deep mourning robes, Joanna looked taller, and thinner, and sweeter than ever. There was no longer the freshness of youth in her face; but a beauty that youth cannot boast, the beauty which only long years of spiritual experience can ripen, shone all over her pale, delicate countenance. Leaning over the raspberry vines, and staining her finger-tips with their crimson lusciousness, her mind was busy with graver things. She was thinking of Miss Ridalhuber, and of the youthfulness and vivacity which, on that picnic day, she had witnessed among the young people of the town.

"My life," she said, to herself, "has missed all that. I can never remember one such day of buoyant happiness as those girls will carry in their memories for many a year."

Not that my girlhood was altogether wanting in joys; oh, no," and the raspberries swam in a mist before her eyes. "But that was all so still, so deep, and in the end so sad. And now my youth is gone, and I shall never—never—laugh that shrill, happy laugh of girlhood; never trifle and coquette and make merry, in that innocent way that so becomes girls, and makes their very lives a beauty. And yet, I am not old; I cannot subside at once into the narrow, monotonous habits of age."

She paused, and a drop that was not dew glistened on the raspberry leaves.

"I must—somehow—win something to love; not to love me. That was all over when my little Kitty died. She can never come back to me, but I shall go to her. Meantime, I must find something to love."

A project existed in a nebulous state in Miss Joanna's mind. She would need somebody more practical than herself to bring about its execution, but, nevertheless, she was quite determined upon that thing. She would have something to love.

XXVII.

HOW MRS. MOSS PAID THE DOCTOR.

One soft midsummer evening, Rebecca had retired to her own room, after tea, to finish copying a manuscript, when she was interrupted by a very gentle knock at the door.

It was Miss Joanna.

"May I come in?" she said.

Rebecca hastened to give her welcome, and to put away her papers, for she saw by Miss Joanna's face that she had something of special import upon her mind.

"Don't your light draw insects?" said Joanna, after a few moments' chat, with an innocent attempt at artifice.

"I think it does," said Rebecca. "Suppose we put it out and sit in the moonlight."

"That will please me a great deal better," said Joanna.

The light was therefore extinguished. The moon streamed in through the open window, and the night breeze swayed the climbing vines around it, through which a bat was flitting to and fro.

"I came over," said Joanna, "just because I felt lonely, and wanted to talk with somebody that would understand me. I get so miserable, at times, since dear little Kitty died, that it seems to me if I don't have some change, I shall get back into those old unhappy ways of which she cured me."

"I am glad you came," said Rebecca, "for I was feeling much in the same mood myself."

"Oh, you should never get lonely, you who have so much to do. Milton says, and I am sure it is true, that it is occupation that I need, and possibly—something else."

"Yes, Miss Joanna, something else."

"Yes, but occupation; not only work for the hands, but work for the head and the heart is necessary to women. We are naturally generators, you know; we have the nervous or creative power in far greater plenitude than men; we suffer from *ennui* when they loll in perfect comfort, and when the stream of constant doing and giving gets choked, the whole life is overflowed with the restrained force, and we get—dreadful thing that it is—nervous.

"And the upshot of it is, that you want something to do?"

"Yes, and I am not like Laura; who, if she were left destitute to-day, could go out into the world, and provide for herself, and at the same time do yeoman's service in reformatory work. I think Laura has a duty in that direction which she will commit sin if she much longer neglects. But that is not my case. I must have work in which my heart is engaged. I must get all my forces into the field, or I shall perish."

"That suggests to me a new idea," said Rebecca, "concerning the difference between what is properly man's and woman's work. A man's work engages his hands, or his head, perhaps both, but seldom, except in a cold or indirect way, his heart. But a woman's work properly strikes the full chord of her being. Head, hands and heart must all work together to make and keep the house, and people it with new life."

"You women with brains philosophize as you breathe," said Joanna, with a quaint little smirk. "Now, I should never have thought of that. But it is so. But to get back to my work. When Kitty died, I thought I could never take another child into her place, and I never can. I loved her, and she loved me, little darling. No one else will ever love me as she did. I am not quite sure that I would have one; but, Rebecca, I might have a child,

whom I could love and care for, and feel an interest in; don't you think so?"

The shadows in the room hid Miss Joanna's face, but the softness of her tones diffused a sense of tender, delicate feeling all about her.

"Certainly," said Rebecca. "I see nothing but good in such a purpose."

"I have an idea in my head," said Joanna, "but I am such an unpractical body, I shall never get about it rightly without a little help."

"Is it anything that I can do?" asked Rebecca, cheerfully.

"I think, perhaps, you might, at least, suggest something. You know Mrs. Moss named her youngest boy after Milton."

"Oh! yes," said Rebecca, in deliberate surprise.

"Do you suppose—she has so many—she would part with that one? It would not be like giving it up altogether, you know, for she would see him often, and we would do well by him. What little money I have, he would have, if he outlived me, and Milton would be a good friend to him."

"Have you said anything to the doctor?"

"Not yet. I felt a little—you know—I thought I'd tell you first."

"And shall I be your minister plenipotentiary?" asked Rebecca, laughing.

"If you will."

"Oh, with pleasure," said Rebecca. "I like the scheme, and though Mrs. Moss is a good mother, she is also a sensible woman, and may, perhaps, be brought to see the matter in that light. You are sure you will be satisfied to take a boy?"

"Yes, I have thought of that. If he grows up, and is a good boy, as, of course, I hope he will be, he will be more

dependence to me by and by. I think I should be very proud of having brought up a boy to a fine, noble manhood."

"He'd upset some of your precise notions wonderfully."

"Oh, yes; I have looked that vision of muddy boots and torn trowsers, and disordered rooms, quite valiantly in the face. I rather think it is just what I need."

"Well, then, I can recommend the child. He is a bright little fellow, and of a finer fiber than the elder children. But, really, I think you might better speak to the doctor yourself. You know the doctor is jealous concerning his own kin."

"So he is, and he's a good brother, *such* a good brother. I don't know what I should have done all these years without Milton. I will speak to him this very night if I can see him alone. Talking with you has made the thing seem so much more real and feasible than it did before. I knew you would understand my feelings, as hardly anybody else could."

Two or three days later, Rebecca and Joanna set out for a walk across the fields to Mrs. Moss' cottage. Miss Joanna was a little nervous, but Rebecca's cheerful chat put some heart into her, and by the time they reached the cottage gate, she was in quite good spirits. The doctor had been consulted, and had given a quiet approval. He had even talked the matter over with Mrs. Moss, quite unbeknown to Miss Joanna, wisely judging that if the plan were to succeed, it must be managed with some skill and force.

"If Joanna takes him," the doctor had said to Mrs. Moss, "he will have what little money she has got, if he does well. I shall see that he has a good education and a fair start in life. I sha'n't make an heir of Milton. The bulk of my money—what there is of it—will go to Laura's children. But I shall see that Milton has a good

start in the world; and, on the whole, if you can make up your mind to give him up, I don't know but the boy will be well enough off."

Mrs. Moss had slept little that night. Moses had hailed the project as a "good thing for the boy;" but Mrs. Moss' heart misgave her. Many tears and many prayers, and much setting of the matter in all possible lights, had gone to her decision. But she had, at last, quietly made up her mind, and when she saw the two ladies approaching across the fields, her face wore a very solemn look.

The children were all outside in the yard, just organizing for a game of tag; little Milton, a five year old, being perched upon the top rail of the fence, watching the process. Joanna stopped and spoke to him.

"Good evening, ma'am," he said, rather shyly, for Miss Joanna was held in great reverence by the children of the village."

"You are a nice little boy," said Joanna; "would you like some candy?"

His eyes grew very bright and expectant, as she put her hand in her pocket and drew forth a long twisted stick of red and white candy.

"Thank you, ma'am," he exclaimed, and was down off the fence in a jiffy to display his prize.

The ladies then passed into the cottage. Mrs. Moss received them with a grave but kindly welcome.

"I suppose I know your errand," she said, after a few minutes' chat. "The doctor was here yesterday and told me all about it. He says you want to take my Milton home with you."

The poor woman made such a visible effort against breaking down, and sustained herself so heroically, that Joanna choked up, and couldn't possibly reply, but Rebecca said:

"I am glad the doctor has been here, for he could put

the matter so much more practically and sensibly than we could. Miss Joanna means nothing but kindness toward you and yours, and we hope you will be able to see it in that way."

"Oh! I do, I do. I know that mothers can't keep their children always with them. There's Theodore, he ain't satisfied here. He's a-going down to New York next month; he's got a good place engaged there, where he can do better, he thinks, than he can here. At first, I thought I couldn't give my consent, but I finally see that it ain't for a mother that's gi'n up and gi'n up all her life, to get selfish in her old age. If he can do better there, he must go."

Her voice would tremble a little, and she stopped and looked down and creased the hem of her apron in silence.

"Yes," said Rebecca, "that is the duty of a mother, to sacrifice her own to her children's good. We hoped you would see this matter of Milton in that light."

"Miss Rebecca," said the mother, looking up suddenly, "this ain't no such matter as that. Theodore's brought up; I've done all for him that I can do; the natural time has come for him to leave home, and God seems to have ordered that he shall go. But Milton's a baby yet, so to speak. I hain't done my duty by him yet. To be sure, if Moses was to die, I might have to put more or less of 'em out to be brought up, and shouldn't be likely to get such chances as this for 'em, neither; but, then, God hain't called me to that trouble yet, nor I hope he won't right away. If I give Milton up, it ain't altogether because I think he's a-goin' to do better; because it ain't clear to my mind, that money nor advantages can ever make up for the loss of an own mother. You'll be good to him, Miss Joanna, I know that. It ain't in your nature to be otherwise; but, then, he ain't your flesh and blood, as he is mine; you hain't known his father and had patience with

him twenty years, as I have, and you can't know and have patience with his child. Still, I know you'll be good to him."

"And you will be his mother still," said Miss Joanna, "and shall see him whenever you choose. Oh, I could not be so selfish as that; to try and put any barrier between a child and his own mother."

"Yes, but there'll be a barrier all the same. His life will be different from my life; he won't set by the same things any more, that his brothers and sisters do; and he may—God knows—get proud and feel above 'em."

Miss Joanna was silent. There was more in the depths of this woman's soul than she could at once comprehend.

"Money ain't always a blessing," continued Mrs. Moss, especially to children; nor advantages ain't any more, unless they make good use of 'em. I've thought about it a good deal, and if it wa'n't for nothing but the advantages, I shouldn't let Milton go. If he stays where God put him, God will be responsible for him. If I go and put him out of the way of the blessings God gave him, for others that I think more of, then I take the responsibility, which I'm loath to do. I'd got just so far a-thinking about it, when I seemed to see another thing, and that was this. Now, Miss Joanna, I ain't a-trying to set myself up, nor give myself airs. I'm just a-telling you the solemn truth, and I want you to know it, because I don't want you to feel as if I sold my child for money.

"There ain't nobody in the world, out of my own family, that's done more for me than Doctor Gaines has. He's been a good friend to me, when I hadn't many other friends to stand by me; and I know he sets more by you than by anything else living. Now, you two have got money and a good name, and good advantages every way. You've got everything but one, and that's children to love you and be good to you in your old age, and to keep up

your name and memory when you are dead and gone. For, what good is a man's life to him, if it is all to go down into the grave with him, and nothing but a tombstone to keep his memory from rotting. So, if I give you my boy—my baby," the tears and the sobs would come then in spite of her, "I don't do it from any proud or selfish gladness that he's to be a bigger man and have more money than his brothers; but because the doctor has given his best to me, which was care and kindness and sympathy when I needed 'em, and now I'm willing to give my best to him when he needs it; and to you, too, Miss Joanna, for I know how lonely you be, and I pity ye."

The tears were raining down Joanna's pale cheeks, and Mrs. Moss was sobbing.

"It is all true that you have said," said Joanna, "and if I can help it, Mrs. Moss, you shall never have cause to regret your generosity."

There was some farther talk, and then it was settled that Milton should make the change the next day. He sobbed some when he understood the matter, and clung to his mother's bosom, with childish passion; and the mother, how her heart yearned over him in that last embrace, the last when he should be hers, no pen can tell; and as she gave him up to go, she said:

"Don't ever think, Miss Joanna, that I cared for the money; but I hope he will be a good boy, and a comfort to you and yours, as you grow old and need him."

And Joanna, seeing the strength and truthfulness of this mother's heart, felt more humble in her presence than if she had been a queen.

Rebecca had staid behind on that first evening, to ask a few questions about Theodore.

"He's bent upon going," said his mother. "Seems like the boy's possessed with the idea of being a rich man."

"Yes, but does he realize what it is to leave home and friends, and go into such scenes of temptation as he must encounter in that great, wicked town?"

"Ah! that is it, Miss Rebecca, that is what troubles me most. I've tried to do my duty by Theodore, but when I think of it, I ain't clear that I've done all I ought to by him. I've tried to have his father talk to him, but he won't take nothing from his father as he would from me, and there's some things I can't talk to him about. But I've tried to do my duty by him, and must trust God for the rest. He's been a good boy so far, ever since he got into business, and I do hope he'll be good to the end."

Then she went on, with motherly care and pride, and told how many shirts she had made for him, and how many stockings, and how she had worked hard to buy him a handsome Bible to put in his trunk; and when at last it was all told, she could only say:

"And, Miss Rebecca, won't you pray for him, that he may be kept from all evil. He is my best hope and stay in this world, and I can't—I can't—lose him by reason of bad conduct."

"Indeed I will; and, Mrs. Moss, you must remember that his very pride and ambition will be a shield to him."

"Oh! I know that. Theodore won't lie nor he won't steal; and with all he's seen of liquor at home, I ain't much afraid he'll drink; but there's other ways of badness; and my boy, brought up in this quiet town, what does he know about 'em, and what can I tell him; and yet, if I could tell him, he'd take it better from me than from anybody else. Miss Rebecca, I can't see clearly what my duty is."

Just then Theodore came in. He caught right quickly the tone of the two women's talk. He said little while

Rebecca staid, but when she had gone he put his two hands on his mother's shoulders, and looking straight into her eyes, he said:

"Don't you worry about me, mother. I've got that in me that won't give way to anything mean or disgraceful. When I come back to Wyndham, I shall never be ashamed to look you in the face, just as I am doing now. Mother, will you trust me?"

"Yes, Theodore, I will," and, from that moment, the mother's heart was easy about her boy.

XXVIII.

A MAN'S LOVE.

When, on the morning afterward, Mr. Gladstone reviewed the picnic, the only incidents throughout the length and breadth of the day's occurrences which remained impressed upon his mind, were his pleasant chat with Rebecca under the whispering forest trees, and the look of pain in her face as she left him.

All these years of steady, hard work at his profession, with always a deep and solemn purpose in view, had not left Mr. Gladstone a trifler. He had flirted a little with women lately, because such women as fell in his way had seemed to be good for little else than flirting. But since his acquaintance with Rebecca had deepened into a friendship, he had not been in a humor for trifling. Something more than the mere passion of his soul was touched. A new nature, a spiritual being, which he had before been scarcely conscious of possessing, seemed thrilling into subjective life. His vision was clearer; his senses more acute; there was an uplifting of his soul into a purer atmosphere, a grander horizon than he had ever known before. Life in this new air took a joyous brightness, which was not altogether due to the rose-tint which, he was growing quite sensible, suffused it. Apart from this woman, who seemed born to set his soul free from all thrall-dom, and uplift him as on cherubic wings, was the cheering consciousness of this new fact, which he had never more than suspected before, that the outlook of his life *could be* so enlarged and glorified. His eyes were turned upward, to look at this woman, and the wealth of Ophir would not have bought her from his gaze, if she must be replaced by a woman who should draw him back again to his old level.

The tender, lingering memory of those moments of refreshing, which he had passed at Rebecca's side, deepened the remembrance of that look of pain which she wore at parting.

"The speech would have been contemptible," he said to himself, "if it had not had power to wound that gentle heart. It shall be my task to extract the thorn;" and he hugged to himself a most delicious sense of coming joy, as he thought how he should win back the light into that face, which was growing so dear to him.

But an obstacle lay in his way which he could not foresee.

All through the gay scenes of that day, the words of Miss Lillian had rung incessant changes through Rebecca's brain.

"I know Mr. Gladstone very well, and he will never marry—*her*."

Indignant tears pressed up to her eyes, and were choked hotly back. Old unforgotten agonies wrenched her heart anew. There was a time when no one living would have spoken of her with that accent; least of all, Miss Lillian Meredith. Was her life to be forever blighted by that ancient wrong? More poignant, if less deep, was the feeling of that new tenderness, which, now as never before, she saw must be uprooted.

"Because he is noble," she said, "I will not abuse him. I never yet intentionally brought dishonor on any human being. I will not commence with the man whom I—might love."

Therefore, when these two met again, they were very much at cross purposes. Mr. Gladstone was gentle, courteous, winning in his manners, as he had never been before. Rebecca steeled herself to be impassive, unresponding. It was a hard thing for her to do, for in this direction she was not strong, but very weak and yielding. Her heart

ached so for tenderness and rest, that when she saw them offered to her with an intent which she was sure was honest, and in a measure which she knew would be full and satisfying, it was very hard to turn her eyes coldly away, and seem neglectful. And Mr. Gladstone, driven sometimes to the point of despair, by her persistency, still gathered enough of this reluctance from her manner, to feed his hope, and grew more and more determined, day by day.

She avoided him everywhere. Since the day of the picnic, he had never, for a moment, seen her alone. "If I could get five words with her privately," he said, "I believe I could melt this barrier between us; could convince her that I am but too much in earnest; could win her to give up this strange, unnatural opposition. For, let her seem as cold as she may, I do believe she is not insensible."

He might have written. He had thought often of that, but there was such an intense longing in his heart to look into her eyes, when the love-light should be welling up into them; to watch, moment by moment, the swift, tender changes of her face; the flushing and retreating color, the raising and drooping eyelids, the passionate yielding, the coy reticence of her manner, that he felt he could wait, almost indefinitely, for the sake of making that delicious goal at last.

One August evening, entering Miss Joanna's parlor, where he was a privileged guest, he found a group of ladies, representatives of some notable charity, monopolizing Miss Joanna; and standing at a window, looking out quite absently upon the sunset—Rebecca. He sent a little cry of thanksgiving upward, and having made his compliments to Miss Joanna, and excused himself till she should be at liberty, approached Rebecca. As she turned to receive his greeting, he thought he had never seen her look more lovely. She wore a dress of white muslin,

relieved only by a knot of black lace at the throat. A faint color enhanced the beauty of her clear, transparent skin. Her soft, luxuriant hair, its florid tint well kindled by a late sunbeam, was drawn back from the face, and coiled in heavy masses at her neck, while her eyes, half sad, half luminous with a tender light, shone on him like stars out of dusky evening skies.

He took her hand without a word of reply to her quiet "good evening."

"My dear friend," he said, "I love you. Is there any need that you should shun me thus?"

She looked up at him with eyes of such mute, pitiful dismay, that he could but apologize for his abruptness.

"Forgive me," he said; "I know you cannot answer me here; but won't you give me five minutes alone with you? My buggy is at the door; when your call is ended, let me drive you home. Will you go now?"

"Oh!" she said, "my friend, I would have spared you this, if you would have let me."

Her words and tears were both ominous, and he felt his heart sinking; but he had gone too far now to retract. With one long, steady look at her face, which, half averted, was still plainly suffused with pain, he turned to Miss Joanna, and gravely excusing himself in a way which long acquaintance made permissible, came back and offered his hand to Rebecca. Her shawl and dainty evening head-dress were in the hall, and she was quickly wrapped. The tenderness of his manner, as he placed her in the buggy, and adjusted her robes, was touched with the sadness her words had caused him; and he was seated by her side, and had headed the horse for a dim, secluded road, which led quite out of the town, before a word was spoken by either.

"Now, Rebecca," he said, at length, with a gracious endeavor to be gay, "I want to know my doom."

She put back the weakness which had fringed her eyes with tears, and made one grand effort for composure.

"Mr. Gladstone," she said, "I feel too deeply the honor, the joy, the bounty of your love, not to regret to see it wasted. If I could ever marry, you, of all men, need not despair; but I am doomed to loneliness."

He was very grave; the pain, and the suddenness of it, blanching his cheek, and quenching the light from his eye.

"Rebecca," he said, "I knew, of course, that there was something in your life which you did not choose to speak about, but I never thought of this."

He was silent for a few minutes, thinking over, with that lightning-like celerity and skill which the mind acquires in such life-and-death emergencies, all the grave, sweet beauty and purity of her life in these five years that he had known her.

"Rebecca," he said, "you might trust me as you would trust—I had almost said God—in this matter, but I will not ask that. Only tell me, is this, of which you speak, absolute, irreversible?"

She hesitated for a moment.

"It is an absolute, irreversible fact," she said at last.

"And constitutes a positive, legal barrier to my hopes? Forgive me for pressing you so closely, but so much depends."

"Mr. Gladstone," she said, "there is no legal barrier, but it is not the less positive for that."

With that the stern, critical habit of his mind gave way before his overmastering passion.

"Rebecca," he said, "tell me that you love me, put your hand in mine with true and honest frankness, and I will face the world with you."

"Mr. Gladstone," she replied, "I have borne pain all my life, and at times the deeper brand of ignominy; but I never yet inflicted either, intentionally, and I never will."

If I should say I loved you, and then should marry you, I should prove my vows untrue."

He relapsed into a grave and thoughtful silence. Rebecca was suffering untold agonies, which finally wrenched out these few painful words.

"And yet," she said, "I cannot bear that you should think too hardly of me."

"I do not, Rebecca," he interrupted. "There could be no crime which these last five years would not atone for; and out of crime they could never have sprung."

They had plunged down rocky hill-sides, into a deep and tangled wood, where the dusk, dew-laden and full of earth-smells, was scarcely penetrated by the lingering glory of the twilight outside.

"Rebecca," said Mr. Gladstone, at length, "have you never told this—your history—to any one?"

She hesitated. "To no one but Mrs. Darrell, and to her only the outlines."

"And do you think she has an equal right with me to your confidence?"

"Oh! my friend, my friend," she cried in agony that could not be controlled, "I cannot tell you."

"Rebecca," he said, and his voice was full of restrained tenderness, "you cannot know—it is impossible—how fully you might trust me. I do not reproach you for that, but I do feel that there may be some morbid sensitiveness of yours; some old, old wound, unhealed and sorer than it ought to be, that would not turn my love aside, but would only make it the more tender; and which, perhaps, if you would bring it to the light, might take a healthier tone, and so at last get cured, but which kept back in darkness may work needless ruin to both of us. Won't you permit me to tell Mrs. Darrell of my love for you, and to ask her, as an old and well-tried friend, if she can bid me God-speed in my wooing."

"Oh! Mrs. Darrell is a woman, and my sister, and she can forgive everything."

Mr. Gladstone had been deeply shocked, and he suffered intense pain; but the love which this woman had awakened in his heart was only rooted in the strong physical stratum of his nature; it stretched its branches and bore its blossoms far up in a higher, more celestial element. Her heart and soul were pure, he knew that. This other stain which her words but dimly conveyed to his mind, if he interpreted her rightly—it grieved and shocked, but did not wholly dismay him.

They rode on in silence. "Mr. Gladstone," said Rebecca, "I cannot bear this much longer. Will you please to turn the horse toward home?"

He obeyed her. They were two miles out of the town.

"My friend," he said, "I have thought this all over, and I cannot give you up. I will not go to Mrs. Darrell, since you seem not to wish it; but I appeal to your own honor and conscience. If an equally grave fault existed to your knowledge upon my side, equally remote in time, equally disconnected in circumstances, would it weigh seriously on your mind against my claim?"

They were driving over an open country now, and the moonlight swept across her face as she lifted it to him, lighting up its drenched and tear-stained beauty, and giving to her smile a saintly sweetness.

"I cannot think of you except as stainless," she said, "and if my life were as free from stain as my soul is, I should not blush to put my hand in yours, in mutual interchange of loving vows. I say this not to encourage you; but simply to vindicate myself, as, I take it, every human creature has the right to do. I would not have you think that you had loved unworthily, for so base a falsehood could only injure both of us. But you have loved most unhappily, and I beg you, as soon as may be, to

renounce that love, and forget one who could bring only misfortune and disgrace to your proud, unsullied name."

He threw the rein over his arm; he put his arm around her; he took her hand in his. He looked into her eyes with a steady, strong, triumphant glance. "Rebecca," he said, "say that you love me; I will be put off with no more evasions."

She met his eye with a mild, regretful glance, that yet was so deep, so full of unspoken passion and yearning.

"Yes," she said, "I love you; I would that I did not."

"You shall unsay the half of that before the moon goes down," he said, "for the love I bear for you is something which misfortune and disgrace can never turn aside. God gave your soul to my soul, and mine to yours, from all eternity, and no work of man shall have power to abrogate the gift. Rebecca, put your hand in mine and tell me that you love me, and that you only hope, as time goes on, to love me more and more."

She did not say the words so boldly again, but neither did she append to them the offensive wish.

Mrs. Darrell, sitting alone upon her front piazza, enjoying the moonlight, saw a carriage driving slowly up the avenue. It stopped at the door, and Mr. Gladstone assisted Rebecca to alight. She stepped forward, peering curiously into Rebecca's flushed, disordered face.

"Mrs. Darrell," said the gentleman, with steady, joyous tones, "congratulate me; I am an engaged young man."

Rebecca tripped past them into the house, her face burning with blushes.

"I do congratulate you most sincerely," said Mrs. Darrell. "No one living knows Reba so well as I do. Therefore, no one else knows so well as I how deeply worthy she is of your unspeakable love and tenderness."

"I thank you for saying that," he said earnestly, offering her his hand, "because it will enable me all the more

effectually to combat the misgivings with which she perplexes herself. Good night, Mrs. Darrell; take good care of my pearl among women."

Mrs. Darrell followed him with her eyes as he rode down the avenue, and rejoiced greatly in her heart.

"They are worthy of each other," she said, "and what more could I say of either of them."

XXIX.

THE RIGHT OF A WOMAN TO HAVE A HUSBAND.

Nature divides the life of woman into three grand eras—girlhood, womanhood, old age. With Laura Darrell the second of these was drawing to a close. It is then that the Great Mother, with strict fidelity, calls each of her daughters to account for her stewardship, drops a tear and a sigh over the inevitable penalty of each long-forgotten sin, breathes a benison of purest love for every duty faithfully performed, and then sets her seal forever upon the irrevocable Past.

Released thus from serving in the Holiest of Holies, Laura Darrell was now, in the purest sense, a citizen of the world. But this time of intimate, mysterious communing with Nature was one of severe physical trial. Her husband tried to comfort her.

"Laura," he said, "I have been a slave to business long enough. I'm going to sell out my active interest in the mills, retaining only a silent partnership, and that will give me plenty of time to stay with you, and take care of you. In the years gone by, I don't think I have always done my duty by you, but now I'm going to make amends."

He finished within a week the contemplated arrangement, and Laura felt that now indeed she should have a husband.

But Mr. Darrell found that he could not throw off the habit of years like a garment. His mornings hung heavily on his hands, if he did not go down to the office and keep the run of things there. If he staid at home in the afternoon, or took Laura out to drive, he missed the stimulus of his old keen activity, and very likely grew listless and indifferent. Little by little, too, it became evident that,

from living so long in a region of thought and feeling so apart from that of his wife, there had grown to be a great gulf between them, which it was exceedingly difficult for him to pass. When Laura talked to him of her headaches, her nervousness, and all the other depressing symptoms of her condition, she might as well have talked Greek. He heard her, felt sorry for her in a general way, but had absolutely no sympathetic appreciation of her feelings.

A great deal is said, and justly, concerning the need of training young women to make good wives; but who ever thought it necessary to train up young men to make good husbands? Michelet, in his *L'Amour*, has indeed made a step in this direction, and, considering that it is a Frenchman talking to Frenchmen, he might have done much worse. The intention, indeed, of the whole book is worthy of much praise; but the execution of it has involved so many errors, and some of them so flagrant, and, from anybody but a Frenchman, whose vision has been distorted by the unblushing immorality of the people among whom he lives, so insulting to woman, that the book amounts after all to no more than a finger-post.

In marrying, a man takes into his care and keeping a being not only the purest in spirit which the world contains, but also the most exquisite and delicate in physical organization — an organization with finer adjustments and nobler uses than any man possesses, however perfect he may himself be in physical development. This being, whom he calls his wife, has her seasons of exaltation and depression; her nodal points of silence as well as her tremulous chords of melody, of which he knows nothing but the external phenomena. Furthermore, she has a whole range of experiences, continuing for a year or more at a time, and of the highest possible importance to himself, herself, and the race, in which he cannot possibly share, except as she admits him to her confidence, and this confidence it is not

her nature to impart, except under the tenderest and most delicately appreciative circumstances. The most refined physical manifestation is that which proceeds from the nerves; and of this nervous sensibility she has more, by virtue of that part of her organization which constitutes her a woman, than he has in his whole body, as the most enlightened physicians readily allow. She is, therefore, correspondingly quick and delicate in her feelings, and shy and timid in her manner of expressing them, except as they are drawn out by means of her love for her husband, which impels her to share everything, even this, her most sacred inheritance, with him. But the husband at his marriage knows of these facts only the hard, material outlines; because medical books, being all the work of men, contain no more than this. If the husband be a coarse, or an unobservant, or a preoccupied man, he may be for a lifetime the companion of a woman, and her deepest meaning be all the time as much a sealed mystery to him, as the curve of the Ellipse was to all astronomers, until, at last, the truth slowly broke upon the world that it was the sweep of God's hand for the stars to follow in.

And she all the time bears the burdens alone, which it is his right and duty to be daily sharing with her.

All honor to the French *savants* of Medicine; from Geoffrey St. Hilaire, through a brilliant succession, to Du Bois and Cazeau, and others of like spirit in our own time. Ten thousand, and twice ten thousand thanks to them for letting in the so much needed light of science upon the old vexed question of the essential purity of woman's nature. But can they expect those poor, hapless bodies, fished out of the Seine, stark and cold, to reveal to them the glowing secret of womanhood?

Oh! fathers, and brothers, and husbands, if you would study the hearts and lives of the dear companions of your

homes with tenderness, and purity, and love, you might shame these workers in poor, dead matter, by the brilliancy of your discoveries.

Laura learned all these things by sad experience. In a month's time, the story of her daily and nightly distresses had grown a weariness to her husband; his patience was exhausted, and if he ever spoke of her ill-health at all, it was to declare that, if there was one nuisance and vexation in this life greater than all others, it was a sick wife.

If the husband is ill, it is his wife's first duty to nurse him and wait upon him with all due patience, and gentleness, and fortitude. If the wife is sick, it is generally considered that she is making a very heavy, if not an unreasonable demand upon her husband's time and temper. Let her, by all means, get well as soon as possible, if she expects his love to outlive the trial.

And now the great temptation of Laura's life assailed her. Her husband's love, in times like this, fell far short of her actual and just requirements. She could not make her soul contented with it. Was it not an occasion to beckon the tempter to her side? Laura Darrell had a strong mind, and a pure heart, and no outward sign or token gave evidence of the inward weakness; but many a delicate and over-tasked woman has gone to her doom through just this gap in conjugal duties. And the world has condemned her so much the more because she had—such a good husband.

But in this, as in many another time of trial, Laura leaned on her friend.

"Reba," she said, "you must give up your copying, and during all your spare hours devote yourself to me." And Mr. Gladstone, who had an interest, now, that this woman should not be overworked, about the same time refused to give her farther employment. So, after office hours, the two women had long talks together.

There was one thing which Ralph could do, and did do, without stint, and that was to watch the issues of new books, and keep these two women provided with the mental aliment they so much loved. To be sure the doctor had said: "You must let books alone;" and Laura did abstain from laborious reading; but she took great delight in watching the march of thought; and in culling here and there the most significant tokens of its progress. And to all these suggestions, she ever added much that was the product of her own quick and fertile brain.

"I am so glad," she said to Reba, one day, "to see this Woman Question everywhere growing in importance. In British homes, and Roman studios, and French ateliers, and in our own American halls of legislation, it is the constantly recurring theme. It is, to be sure, only the more superficial aspects of it which are now considered. There are deeps on deeps yet unsounded, but the eternal underlying principles will be reached at length; and then it will be found that, as, in the original creation, the law of precedence was, first the male and then the female; and as, though men of science are slow to see it, the same law still holds in human reproduction, so the eras of the race arrange themselves. First, the material and masculine one; second, and formed from its substance, as woman from the rib of man, the feminine or spiritual one."

"Very like, very like," parenthesized Ralph, who had strolled into the room during the conversation, and sat reading a magazine. "The individual woman always will have the last word, as everybody knows; why shouldn't the typical woman insist on the same privilege, in regard to the world's affairs?"

Laura went on without heeding him. "So far, woman has lived under protest; a riddle, a perplexity to all beholders, and too often to herself; seen by poets as a princess in disguise, and by practical men as an escaped

lunatic, sadly in need of a straight jacket. Seeming to herself to have inherited a nature as sad, and profound, and mysterious, as that of the ancient sphinx, yet patiently, though painfully, biding her time. The ages only can interpret the Divine, but they are in themselves the mirror of His Being, and they will at last fully reflect His whole purpose concerning woman. Thinking of all this, and seeing how slowly women prepare themselves for the great coming change, I long to cry aloud :

“ ‘ You are queens, my sisters ; put on your ermine ! Let every thought, and word, and deed, be worthy of your royal lineage ! Let your lives unroll themselves before the world, in a pageantry of honor, fortitude, devotion, purity, before which the splendors of the Field of the Cloth of Gold shall grow pale ! Our brothers have subdued the world to the power of the flesh. It is ours to subdue it to the power of the spirit. ’ ”

“ That would be a very different cry from the one which has sounded in the ears of woman for six thousand years,” said Rebecca. “ So long as labor was deemed an unmitigated evil, it is not strange that the pain and peril of child-bearing should have been looked upon as a weakness and a curse ; but, since labor is found to be beneficent, and of true dignity, one would think that the vocation of woman, also, ought to be rescued from the ancient ban.”

“ It stings my soul with scorn and indignation,” said Laura, “ to hear the functions of woman stigmatized as a shame and an infirmity. When such teachings are so universal, when to the pain and suffering which a woman sees before her, to be borne, in most cases, with little help from her husband, is added a sense of inferiority and ignominy, it is no wonder that thousands have recourse to the most cruel and unnatural expedients for avoiding them. It is a burning shame and disgrace to woman, but it is one for which men are fully one-half responsible.”

"I have often thought," said Reba, "when I have heard the sex reproached with never having produced a genius equal to that of Shakspeare, or Milton, or Goethe, that the world greatly misconceives the line of woman's power. The sex may or may not ever produce such examples of intellectual greatness; but it is very certain, that, without the agency of women, these men could never have been born geniuses. Men like Bonaparte and Shakspeare may doubtless owe much of their greatness to the effect of seemingly fortuitious circumstances, upon the organization of the mother, as Bonaparte certainly did, and Shakspeare most probably; but it is safe to assert that a Washington could only be born of a woman whose soul was built up in the most noble and harmonious proportions. And even of Christ, it may be said, without irreverence, that His human nature could never have reached its perfect poise and respondence to the divinity within it, if it had been developed from any flawy or discordant source."

"Reba, the more I think these things over, the clearer it becomes to me that the progress of the world, or what is the same thing, the development of the race, depends mainly upon the women who are mothers. Women are God's agents for renewing the spiritual life of the world; and during the time of the direct exercise of her maternal functions, nature sets the mother carefully apart from all profane or unholy uses; guards her on every hand from the ordinary perils of human life, and impresses upon her nervous system a peculiar sensitiveness, not only to all untoward agencies, that she may withdraw herself from them, but also to all pure, and elevating, and refining influences, that she may drink them in, and so expand and uplift her own soul, for the expansion and uplifting of the new soul which is being created. If women would only speak aloud, and tell the world what they know concerning

these super-masculine experiences, there would be proof brought to convince the most scornful."

"And let us hope, to imbue the minds of women with a healthy, cheerful sense of the responsibility and high honor of their holy calling; to break the bonds of their selfishness, to open their eyes to true wisdom, and so to help on by a mighty impetus the millennial glory."

At that moment, Ralph threw down his magazine, and joined the discussion. He had grown a little stout with his advancing years, and had now and then a thread of silver scattered through his curling hair, but was still a remarkably handsome man of forty-five, with the alertness of his manner subdued, by leisure, into a look of keen intelligence, mingled with good humor. He was just in time to catch the tenor of Reba's last remark.

"Woman's rights and the millennium!" he exclaimed, with the familiarity of a man in his own house. "My dear women, you are carrying this matter too far. When you talk about these exclusive experiences of women, you make a very one-sided affair of it, forgetting that men, too, have their exclusive experiences. What does a woman know about the troubles and perplexities of a business man? or, what does the wife of a poet, if she be an ordinary good house-wife, know of the grand imaginations and inspirations of the great man's soul? I tell you, there are two sides to the story."

"We are speaking of quite a different thing from all that. These things are incidental, mere circumstances common to both sexes. It may just as well be the woman—in France commonly is—who carries on the business and experiences the perplexities; or who has the poet soul and is mated with the common-place man, as Mrs. Hemans and Mrs. Norton were. But this other thing is a matter quite separate, in which every woman—from her who scours knives and scrubs floors for a living, to the

queen upon her throne—has a share, and to which no man, from highest to lowest, can be admitted. The functions of woman which are *additional* to those of man,—the sacred endowment of Heaven to the mothers of the race—impose upon her, from the moment of maturity, conditions both physical and mental, of health and disease, which are utterly impossible to him, and for which he has no counterbalancing experience. The function of maternity is not a small and unimportant one, but, as reproduction is always and everywhere the highest aim of physical life, a grand and crowning one. The organism employed is only less complex and sensitive than the brain, and the physical experiences to which it gives rise form the most varied and important modifications of the human system known to medical science. Is it, therefore, to be for a moment supposed, that the mental experiences connected with it are less important and less varied? When women are sufficiently well trained to write medical books, the truth about this matter will be much better understood than at present. Then we shall know that all that vast range of diagnostics which has baffled the skill and intuition of physicians of all ages, is not the infliction of an arbitrary vengeance, but the indication of nature's beneficence toward the forming soul."

"Well," said Ralph, resignedly, "of course, you are out of my reach now; but, if all you say is true, it appears to me that the sooner one half of the sex turn doctors, to expound these things to the other half and to the world, the better. Judging by my own limited observation, it is not to be wondered at, that physicians of the male sex are puzzled. I always thought it was an indication of Divine goodness toward man that He spared him all these things, and made an inferior sort of creature on purpose to bear them for him."

"That has been the usual comfortable supposition of

men," said Laura, "and too many women have taken it ready-made from their hands; have been contented to consider themselves the scape-goats of the race in this matter of suffering; to put on long faces, and say with Shylock, that 'sufferance is the badge of all our tribe,' and at the most to wonder why God, who is, as they are taught, a being of love and justice, should manifest such partiality to the stronger sex."

"Oh! the curse covers all that, you know," said Ralph, complacently.

"So the curse of Ham was said to cover African slavery, but the cover got too small, one day, and the slaves went free. And so I fancy it will be in the other case. Seriously, Ralph, God is not unjust, and never inflicts extraordinary pains, except as a means of extraordinary good."

"Well, you've a great work before you, if you expect to oust men from the comfortable position of superiority which they have enjoyed for six thousand years, with all the privileges and perquisites attached. I wish you success, but you'll need something more than good wishes."

It was half banter—half earnest—but Rebecca said to herself, as he left the room—

"The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small;
With patience stands He waiting, with exactness grinds He all."

XXX.

THE VERDICT OF THE SEWING CIRCLE.

When Mr. Slade left Mrs. Darrell's presence upon the occasion heretofore chronicled, he was full of wrath and indignation. If there is one prerogative of men which is held by the sex in general more high, and sacred, and indefeasible, than any other, it is that of making themselves as vile as they please in the matter of licentiousness. Women may gently expostulate with them concerning their materiality in religious things, and they will sigh profoundly and repentantly over the error of their ways; they may inveigh against the use of alcoholic liquors and tobacco, and the men will still, in their better moods, cry *peccavi*, with genuine humility; even the charge of gaming and recklessness of living, they will meet with a reticence which is not vindictive; but let a woman dare to point her finger in the direction of the unlawful indulgence of their lust, and every quill on the porcupine's back is erect in an instant.

Men will make laws to punish every other species of crime, but this; but herein they will brook no interference whatever. In this matter they will be absolute, untrammelled, defiant of God and their fellows. If there is any reason at all for this, it is that they have been taught that it is a folly to injure themselves, a crime to injure their fellow-man, but a mere matter of caprice whether or not they will be just to this weak creature which nature has provided for their use.

It was exactly in this spirit that Mr. Slade resented the indignity offered him by Mrs. Darrell. His first impulse was the natural one of shame and decency, to conceal the

shaft, but almost instantaneously the other feeling conquered it. Long before he reached his lodgings, he had said to himself:

"Mrs. Darrell is—Mrs. Darrell; but she shall nevertheless be taught that she cannot interfere in a man's private affairs in this way, with impunity. There are other women in this town just as good as Mrs. Darrell, who will not be sorry for an occasion to wound her pride. We'll give the matter an airing."

If a woman is to be hounded, the rule is to set the women on. There is a class of them that are well trained to the purposes of their masters, and they have naturally a keener scent for evil, a more vivid imagination, and stronger powers of vituperation than those gentlemen possess.

It was not a week before the village was ablaze with scandal. There was a class, as there always will be, in every order-loving town, whose verdict was, "Served him right." Their sentiment was, if the law cannot be made to reach a man's immoralities, something must; and individuals have a perfect right to take the matter of self-defense into their own hands. Below that was a class of men, not themselves immaculate, to whom, of course, self-preservation was the first law; then a class of women, who had husbands, or sons, or brothers, who needed protection, and who had been well drilled to cry out that this was a matter in which the modesty of women commanded them to be silent; and, still below them, a class of women and young girls, the natural "vines," whose one prevailing instinct was to stand by every man through right and wrong, because who could tell which one of the sex might be their future husband.

This latter class was the more numerous, in this case, because the gentleman in question was very popular in his own set. A circle of young ladies, among whom Miss

Lillie Meredith was very prominent, "adored" him. These unanimously resolved, to use their own elegant phraseology, to "stick up" for Leslie Slade, under any and all circumstances.

Of course, with all this publicity, this affair could not be kept out of the sewing circle, where the open review of the young man's life led to a great deal of remark, some for, some against the subject of it, which cannot properly be repeated here; but which resulted in setting many sensible and judicious people thinking, that, if ever the homes of society are protected against these invaders of family peace, the good work must be done, nay, that it ought properly to be done by women. If they have not the necessary spirit and conscience, where in the world shall these requisites be found?

Yet, after all, when the evening came, and Mr. Leslie Slade appeared in the parlor, he perceived little diminution in the ardor of his welcome. Some few there were who looked a trifle coldly at him, but the evident zeal with which Miss Meredith, and her set, strove to allay any suspicion of disloyalty which might arise in the young man's mind, more than soothed his sensitive vanity.

Toward the close of the evening, happening to find himself alone with Miss Meredith, in a corner of the piazza, he ventured to say to her:

"Is it fancy, do you think; or is Mrs. Evans a little less cordial to your unworthy servant, than usual?"

"I'm sure I can't say about that," said Miss Lillie. "I only know that some of the ladies have been abusing you fearfully, this afternoon. You may be sure I wasn't one."

"Is that so? I have to thank you, I am sure. But would you be so kind as to tell me what were the charges they brought?"

"Oh! I couldn't do that; but it all grew out of that cruel speech of Mrs. Darrell."

"For which I never cared the snap of my finger. Mrs. Darrell is—insignificant."

"Perfectly so, in such matters. She sets herself up too much above her neighbors, for anybody to care about her."

"But, then, I suppose her position might give her words some weight."

"With certain people, perhaps; but not with those who are your friends. I'm sure I think the whole affair in very bad taste, and so I am sure does every one. Let's say no more about it."

"Certainly not, if you wish it. I can think of twenty pleasanter things to talk about," and he went on talking, no doubt, about those twenty other things, for the two were missed from the parlor, and their absence commented upon, before they had left that well shaded nook among the Madeira vines.

Yet, cavalierly as they had disposed of Mrs. Darrell and her opinion, it is nevertheless certain, that, from that very time, Mr. Leslie Slade was looked upon with increasingly less favor by the better class of society in Wyndham. For the first six months the change was scarcely apparent; at the end of a year it was quite so. By that time, he began to feel that there was but one means of salvation for him; he must marry. Miss Lillian Meredith was not the woman he would have chosen eighteen months before; but, when it became evident that his chances for doing better were growing few, he made the most of her devotion to him, and asked her to become his wife. Her delight was unspeakable, and she named an early day.

At this very sewing circle, Mr. Linscott met the object of his affections, and enjoyed also a half hour's *tête-à-tête* upon the piazza. Mr. Linscott had been fully satisfied, when he first became acquainted with Miss Ridalhuber, that she was possessed of that gentle, yielding disposition, which he considered of the first importance in a wife.

He was not yet, and very likely never would be, wholly undeceived. It had, nevertheless, invariably happened, that, when their tastes or opinions differed, she had *not* been the one to yield. On this particular occasion, she had mentioned to him the time when it would be necessary for her to leave Wyndham.

"So soon, my angel," was the reply. "Can you not be brought to reconsider that decision?"

"I should be very happy to, but papa's directions are quite explicit."

"And you are so obedient a daughter that you do not think of expostulating. Azarian, I yield at once. Such obedience on your part delights me. There is something in the spectacle of a gentle, refined, intelligent woman, yielding herself graciously to the dictation of her male protectors, simply because Providence has so ordered, that touches me inexpressibly."

"I have always supposed," said Azarian, meekly, "that it was my duty as a Christian to be obedient, and I hope I have endeavored to perform it."

And then they went on to talk of the wedding day. Mr. Linscott proposed May. He was the more particular about May, because, independently of his natural haste in the matter, it would be inconvenient for him to be absent from his parish later in the season than that.

"How very unfortunate," said Miss Ridalhuber; "I am sure mamma would never consent to my being married in May."

"Why not, my sweetest?"

"Because it is the anniversary month of poor, dear brother John's death."

"Ah!" said Mr. Linscott, regretfully, "let us say April, then; I should like that even better."

"Of course," said Azarian, "I should prefer to please you in this matter, but—"

"What is it, Azarian? You must never be afraid to speak to me with the most entire confidence."

"You know brother Paul will be studying medicine during the winter, at Philadelphia. He will not be able to be at home before the first of May, and I could never think of making preparations for the wedding without Paul's assistance. I have always been so accustomed to rely on Paul. You know I am not at all a self-reliant person."

"But June is really a very inconvenient month for me."

"Oh! but you have such capacities for disposing of things. Do you know, you always reminded me before—before I at all thought of you as a lover—when I saw your energy and determination—of Napoleon's boast that he controlled circumstances."

Mr. Linscott smiled. That bit of adroit flattery had done its work. It was settled that June was to be the month.

"Early in June," he still stipulated.

"The very first week, if you like."

"Mr. Linscott kissed her, and inly congratulated himself upon having secured such a dear, confiding, obedient creature for a wife.

That same evening, as Miss Ridalhuber stood combing out her fine hair before the glass, Mrs. Evans entered the room.

"Azarian, dear," she said, "I noticed that you had a long conversation with Mr. Linscott this evening, and I could not rest till I knew if the wedding day was appointed."

"It is," said Azarian, calmly.

"And when is it to be?"

"The fourth of next June."

"I thought he would have been in more haste."

"He was, rather, but I vetoed a short engagement as

improper. I didn't intend to forego the pleasure of another winter in town. To come to the country to reside in summer is bad enough. I never could endure a winter to commence with."

"But why not April or May? I really am impatient to see the thing consummated; it is of so much importance to you, you know, to be well settled in life."

"Yes; but I'm in no particular hurry. As the case stands now, I think I can afford to wait. As for April or May, spring things can never be really elegant, you know, and they only last a few weeks. At the first of June I can have the benefit of the summer styles, and then my dresses will be fresh till October. As every one will know that I am about to be married, I shall get very little for spring, so that all the expense can be for the *trousseau*. Besides, I have a fancy for June, and I shall go to Saratoga on my wedding tour."

"Such a cool head as you have, Azarian, and how you do manage that man."

"That last ought to be no wonder to you, Élise."

"Mark would be very impracticable, I know, if it were not for my influence over him; but, then, I am not half so cool as you. However, I congratulate you with all sincerity. I suppose men need managing, else God would not have adapted women so exactly to the purpose."

Miss Ridalhuber acquiesced with perfect simplicity; but a disinterested observer might possibly query whether, after all, it was the Divine intention that a woman should use the very considerable power which is undoubtedly entrusted to her, wholly for her own selfish purposes.

XXXI.

MILTON GAINES, JUNIOR.

Village scandal had few terrors for Mrs. Darrell, and even the fact that Mr. Slade and his party had voted her "insignificant," did not in the least disturb her peace of mind. She was far more deeply interested in the success of Joanna's experiment with Milton Gaines, Junior. The doctor, with his usual regard for the forms, had already announced his intention of obtaining legal sanction for this change in the name of the youth; and Miss Joanna's taste and industry had so modified his personal appearance that a stranger would scarcely have imagined that he was not "to the manner born." There was very little said about it, but the truth was that the hearts of these two lonely people were greatly cheered by the presence of this little child. When people are young, they may fancy children are a nuisance, and purchase some years of selfish comfort and freedom from annoyance by dispensing with their presence. But, as they advance in years, they invariably feel how wise is nature's way of completing her circle, by linking the hand of the aged in the tender clasp of the little child. The doctor had given his life to these women who so much needed it, and he had never deeply repented the sacrifice. But it was a consolation to him, now that the silver threads outnumbered the dark ones in his locks, to lead this child by the hand, to hold him upon his knee, to impart to him some of the many lessons which his long experience of life had taught him. He liked to think, too, that the boy bore his name; that by and by, when he should be laid in the church-yard, and his life should be only a quickly fading memory, this boy should

keep his name still fresh in the hearts of men, and should, mayhap, by his virtues and usefulness, add to it, if not increase of honors, yet, in some measure, length of days.

It was curious to hear the grave aphorisms which the old man poured into the ears of the boy, and to watch the look of intelligence upon the child's face, which seemed to say that the heart also was impressed. Some childish loss had brought the tears to Milton's eyes.

"My boy," said the doctor, gravely, yet not unkindly, "fools and heroes never weep. The—boy—who never weeps, is—a—hero; the—man—who never weeps, is—a fool—or a knave."

So Milton dried his tears, and his heart grew big with the thought of being a hero.

As for Miss Joanna, she took on the mother-care as she had never done for little Kitty. A woman's heart goes out with so much deeper yearning and tenderness to her sons than to her daughters. Their future seems so much wider; the scope of their lives so much grander, and, alas! the perils and dangers which beset them so much more fatal. So Joanna, like any true mother, mingled, with the mending of trowsers, tender, foreboding prayers. She emptied the heterogeneous contents of play-boxes, with strange yearnings for indices of future character. She trained the youth in manners and morals with a trembling, at times, almost a hopeless forecast. So, day by day, her best and most intimate life grew into his life, till, if he coughed, she trembled; and if, over-tired from play, he fell into a flushed and restless sleep, she called the doctor, to know if the child hadn't a fever; because if he *should* die, you know!

And people sighed about poor Joanna Gaines, that she was wearing her life out for that child, and wondered the doctor did not interfere; as if every true mother living had not worn out her own life in just exactly that way, to

make fresh, and strong, and beautiful, the lives of her children. Worn it out, did I say? God does not suffer such lives to wear out. He renews them day by day. Statistics will show you that, of all His human creatures, He gives to mothers the longest lives.

But Joanna had other trials. She was naturally a deeply religious person, and her whole soul was bent upon giving this boy a thorough doctrinal training. When she had commenced this course with Kitty, beginning duly and conscientiously, when the child reached her third year, with the old Primer,

"In Adam's fall,
We sinned all,"

the doctor had not found a word of fault. But now, to Joanna's surprise, he said to her one day,

"Joanna, girls will take almost any kind of religious instruction, and get good out of it, because their natures are religious. It isn't so with boys. If you are not very careful, they will take dislikes and prejudices, and so get more harm than good. If I were you, I wouldn't teach Milton the Westminster catechism quite yet, not—quite—yet. Tell him about Christ, and the good women and the good men who lived about him and loved him. Feed him with milk first; boys don't take too strong meat in religious things so quick as girls do."

Now, Joanna, with all her faith in her brother, knew that he was not a professed Christian; that he had stronger dislikes among the clergy than among any other class, though there were, here and there, ministers whom he thoroughly esteemed; that, generally, he was broader and more latitudinarian in his views than she would have desired. Therefore, there was a conflict in her mind whether or not it was quite safe in this matter to follow his advice. After much study and prayer, she finally

compromised the matter. She did not teach him the Westminster catechism, seeing that at six years old he could hardly be expected fully to understand all its profound meanings. She did teach him about Christ, took great pains to impress his youthful imagination with the stories of the Shepherds, and the Wise Men, and the Babe lying in a manger; and then she gave him, besides, a simple, clear outline of Christ's mission and agency in the plan of salvation, to which the doctor did not object.

"I know how strictly Milton was brought up," said Joanna, "and it did not make a Christian of him, at least, not outwardly; though I trust God, who sees the heart, does not always follow our blind judgment. Let us be so tender with this young soul, that Christianity, at least, shall not wear a forbidding aspect to him."

It comforted Joanna a good deal to know that Mr. Evans, her own minister, and a man full of Christian love and zeal, quite approved her course; but Mr. Linscott, who, being a good deal in Wyndham this summer, took great interest in Miss Joanna's plans, heartily demurred.

One warm August afternoon, Mr. Linscott had been drinking tea with Miss Joanna, and this very subject of Milton's religious training had been under discussion. After tea they all went into the neat, old-fashioned parlor, with its furniture of mahogany and haircloth, studded with brass nails, and its portraits in oil looking down from the walls. It was rather a solemn room to Milton, Jr., and when he was called into it, to see Mr. Linscott and be talked to about religion, the mercury in his thermometer sank quite into his boot heels. But the doctor, noticing the fall of his countenance, took his hand gravely and said to him:

"Milton, my boy, never be afraid of anybody. Know yourself, that is all."

So encouraged and led in by the doctor, Milton took

heart of grace, and stood before Mr. Linscott with an open brow and a confident eye.

Miss Joanna, in her pretty white jaconet, and old fashioned jewelry of jet and pearl, and the dainty rose blooming on her cheek, and motherly trembling and solicitude in her eye, was far more nervous than he appeared; while the doctor, in his great arm-chair by the window, looked grave, and hid a twinkle in his eye by downcast lids.

"Milton," said Mr. Linscott, "let me hear you say your Primer verses."

"The boy commenced with "Adam's Fall," and went straight on, through the whole alphabetical line, without blunder or hesitation. His courage rose, as he neared the close of his task, and seeing Miss Joanna's happy eye, and Mr. Linscott's look of grave approval, he wound up with a great flourish, and uplifted voice:

"Zaccheus he
Did climb a tree,
His Lord to see;

*The limb did break, and he did fall,
And he didn't see his Lord at all."*

"Oh! Milton, how could you?" exclaimed Miss Joanna.

"The doctor said so," said Milton, stoutly, with a look which plainly indicated his firm faith in the historical verity of the statement.

"But, then, it is not in the book, you know, Milton."

Mr. Linscott looked very grave, but finally coughed, and passed on to the next exercise.

"Who made you, child?" he asked, solemnly.

"God," the boy replied, in a reverent tone.

"What is God? I suppose you know your catechism?"

"No, sir," said Milton.

"I am sorry for that," said Mr. Linscott; "I hold that children cannot too early be taught the great foundations of our holy belief. When my little Minnie was three years

old, she could recite it perfectly. I shall tell you what God is, and I hope you will try to remember. In the language of the Westminster catechism: 'God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.' Now, my son, can you remember that?"

After a few trials, Milton was able to repeat it correctly.

"There, Milton," said Mr. Linscott, with satisfaction, "if you don't learn anything more than that to-day, you will, nevertheless, have cause to bless the day as long as you live."

"Milton," said the doctor, "what is a spirit?"

"New England rum," answered Milton, promptly.

"Oh!" said Mr. Linscott, much shocked, "that is a very serious error?"

"Guess not," said Milton; "the doctor always calls it spirit; and when Tom Barker got drunk, and fell off a load of hay, and broke his neck, Miss Joanna took me to the funeral, and the minister said the Lord came to Tom in that black bottle; and that bottle had rum in it, *I know*."

Mr. Linscott spent a quarter of an hour, striving to enlighten the child's mind concerning the difference between matter and spirit; not, however, with the most satisfactory success; seeing that the language of theologians is usually, for some occult reason, very widely different from the simple phraseology in which their Master taught the multitudes; which is, perhaps, one great reason why the "carnal heart" is so averse to their teachings.

Miss Joanna was the more pained at this want of spiritual perception in Milton, because she had taken him to that funeral, in opposition to the doctor's ideas, for the express purpose of impressing his young mind with a terror of the judgments of God. Of course, if the doctor had not viewed the result with a twinkle of secret satisfaction, he would have been more or less than human.

But the religious examination went on.

"Milton," said Mr. Linscott, "when I say that God is an all-powerful Being, what do I mean?"

"That He can do anything He pleases."

"Yes; in the days of Joshua, He commanded the sun and moon to stand still, and they obeyed Him. Do you suppose God could put the meeting-house into your pocket, if He chose?"

"No, sir," said Milton.

"Why not, Milton? If He could part the Red Sea, so that the Israelites could walk over on dry land, and make even the sun and moon stand still in the heavens, why couldn't He put the meeting-house into your pocket?"

"'Cause I hav'n't got any," said Milton.

"Oh!" said Mr. Linscott, taken a little aback.

"Milton," said the doctor, with deep interest, "hav'n't you got any pocket?"

Miss Joanna hastened to explain.

"When he came here," she said, "his clothes had pockets in them; and he kept them so full of *everything*, knives, and keys, and strings, and apples, and doughnuts, and sticks, and old stockings to make balls of, and they tore out so, that when I made his new clothes I did not put in any pockets."

"That will never do," said the doctor; boys must have pockets. You may teach them the Westminster catechism or not, as you like; but you *must* give them pockets. It hurts a boy's self-respect not to have a pocket; I should expect a boy to grow up a liar and a thief, if he didn't have one. Milton must have a pocket."

Miss Joanna sighed, but promised obedience.

Mr. Linscott indulged in a few deeply theological exhortations, and then rose to go.

"He didn't ask me," said Milton, regretfully, as the door closed after him, "about the baby Jesus that lay in the

manger, nor the Shepherds, nor the Wise Men, nor none of those things that I could have said better."

Miss Joanna, herself not a little heart-sore, took him in her arms, and comforted him, and showed him the evening star, and the beautiful golden sky of the sunset, and told him about the New Jerusalem, with the river flowing through it, and the trees growing on its banks; and then she undressed him, and heard him say his evening prayers, and sat by his side till he went to sleep, watching for the moon to rise.

Then she went to her own room; not to wrestle with an old, dead grief, that would steep her eyes in tears till midnight; but to thank God for this fresh young life, which did so draw hers out into the sunlight, and to ask Him for grace and guidance, to meet all the exigencies of its growth and demands; and then to sleep—sweet, calm, refreshing sleep.

XXXII.

ROSE COLOR.

In those days the lives of Rebecca and her lover flowed on to a golden tune. This new love was a broader and sweeter experience than either of them had ever known before. It renewed the cool fresh spring-time of their lives, and they became young again with the immortal youthfulness of love.

Mr. Gladstone was passionately fond of a fine horse. Rebecca rode well, also, and often, in the cool, dewy evenings of the early autumn, they mounted their horses and rode out of the town through the deep woods where the late sunshine broke through golden-tinted foliage, and the air was sweet with the breath of the pines, and the silence was stirred by the chatter of squirrels and the dropping of nuts. On again, over the smooth, open hills, with God's beautiful world lying wide and varied at their feet; winding streams and glint of ponds, and stretch of meadow and fringe of woodland, with the soft autumn haze over all, and the pearly rim of the horizon enclosing all. And then the stars came out and the dew glistened on the leaves by the roadside, and the dusk fell through the great, wide spaces, and the darkness separated these two trembling hearts from all the world beside. Or, there were evening loiterings through the pine woods, or along the silver stream-side, or bits of quiet chat under the trees on the lawn, or in the arbor which stood at the foot of the garden walk; all fragments of celestial light and beauty to be hidden away in their hearts; secretly treasured, like pearls in a mine, fit to light up hereafter all dull and dark experiences. This chat of lovers, so unspeakably tender

and precious to themselves, so commonplace to all the world beside; these delicate revealings of the heart, so momentous to each other, so little significant outside that range of intimate interests which they are building up, a temple for their souls alone to abide in for a lifetime, who shall transcribe it. The bloom on the plum, the spray from the waterfall, the changing form of sunset clouds, are not more exquisite or more intangible.

Rebecca sat in the library one evening, when Mr. Gladstone was announced. Her dress, some silvery poplin, shot with azure hues, with a delicate lace collar pinned with a cross of pearls—her lover's gift—had been arranged purposely to please his eye; for Mr. Gladstone was fastidious, she had learned, and she took a womanly pleasure in giving him the simple, yet ever new delight of a fresh toilet. Reclining in an easy library chair, with the late sunshine resting goldenly upon her hair, and a book of poems in her hand, her delicate white hand on which *his* ring glistened, Mr. Gladstone felt, as he looked at her, a sweetness in the sense of ownership which he had scarcely ever felt before.

"So exquisite, and—mine," was his secret thought.

"Don't rise, Reba," he said, "you look so sweetly now, just as you sit there, that I would not have you lose the position for the world."

She looked up and smiled at his fond, foolish fancy.

"May I offer you this unoccupied hand?" she said, "or will that, too, spoil your picture?"

"No," he said, "I shall take the hand," and he drew his chair beside her, so as to sit very near, but facing her; "that is just what is needed to the best effect. How is my little friend this evening?"

"Very well, very happy," she replied. "It sometimes seems, too happy."

"No, dear, God meant that people in love should be

happy. Of all his earthly gifts, he has put his seal most plainly and indisputably on this one of love."

"As if he had made a rift in Heaven's walls, and let a slant beam of the glory down through. Having drawn our eyes upward, will he not by and by close up the seam and leave us to our darkness again?"

There was a look of trouble in her soft, child-like eyes, and Mr. Gladstone became instantly all tender eagerness to allay it.

"What saddens you to-night, my friend?" he said. "Tell me all about it, and you will feel better."

She smiled. "Old memories, I think," she said. "Something in these poems I have been reading, made me think of my mother as I dimly remember her. She was a Quakeress of wealthy family, but marrying out of the society — my father was a Presbyterian clergyman — she was estranged from all her friends. Three years after her marriage, she moved away from their vicinity, and from that time until the day she died — it was when I was five years old — she never heard from them, except casually in an indirect way. This was the sadness of her life; the brightness of it, was the tender, mutual love which made her and her husband the most quietly and deeply happy people I ever knew. But when she died it was all changed. An aunt of my father, a middle-aged and most austere woman, came to live with us, and all my memories from that time till I was twenty, are chilled and saddened by the asperity of that woman's life. My father, indeed, loved me tenderly and kept me much with him. He educated me; I had learned to read Latin and Greek, and even listened intelligently to his reading of the Psalms in Hebrew. I remember so well the deep melody and beauty of the twenty-third psalm, as I caught from him its under deeps of meaning. 'He leadeth me in green pastures and beside waters of stillness,' always gave me,

in the quaint Hebrew words, a sense of repose, and deep peacefulness, that I never caught from any translation. He taught me reverence for my mother, for her gentleness, her dignity, her tender, gracious womanliness, building up my very soul after that saintly model, and showing me, in a way that I could never forget, all that it is to be a true woman, tender wife, and angel mother. When I was sixteen, he died. It seemed then that all the light and beauty of my life had gone out forever. Four years more I lived with that sour, stern woman; all that was tenderest and most refined in me chilled, bruised, lacerated daily by her native angularities and her habitual acerbity. I think she meant well. I think life wore to her just that chill, forbidding aspect; and souls that found in it flowers and sunshine, brightness and beauty, seemed to her to be sporting upon the brink of precipices, with fiery billows rolling beneath them. To my life with my parents, I look back with unutterable tenderness; all that came after—is bitter—bitter beyond telling.”

“Then, dear, don’t recall it. Don’t dash with salt and brackishness the pure cup of the present happy time. You looked so sweet and tranquil when I came in, I cannot bear these tears and this look of pain upon your face.”

“But, my friend, I wake up in the nights and feel guilty toward you; and yet, when the day comes, I can never, never tell you.”

“Yes, dear, that is just it. It is in the night-time that you feel guilty, not in the pure, open day. It is a morbid feeling—about something which, when years of married happiness have tuned our lives to perfect unison, you will tell, and I shall hear, with a feeling as if it belonged to some far-away time and some far-away woman, and it will cause no pain to either; but which now would be a poignant grief to you, and, therefore, a profound grief to

me. Long ago you satisfied my heart in the matter. Let us say, let us think no more about it."

What is that strange power, is it fate, is it God, which so often impels us to do the very thing it would seem we ought not to do, and that against our own desires and inclinations? If there was one thing which, at some moments of his life, Abraham Gladstone desired to know more than all others, it was just this thing which he was now burying from his knowledge. Something within him told him this was best, and therefore he did it; and so doing, insured, let us believe, his after reward.

So cheered and encouraged, Reba forgot her pain.

"I have been preparing a little surprise for you. You never heard me sing, I think."

"Do you sing? I'm delighted. Let me have a taste of your powers at once."

"I had not sung for many years," she said, "and fancied I had lost my voice altogether; but recently I have been so happy that the old songs come back to me, and actually plead for utterance."

She led the way into the parlor where the piano stood, and sitting down played a soft prelude, and then, while he was still wondering at the delicacy of her touch, commenced the sweet and tender strains of an old ballad. Her voice did not seem to him wonderful for power or brilliancy, but possessed a rare and deep pathos, and a truth and beauty of expression which mere cultivation never bestows. Mr. Gladstone was charmed.

"Why did you never tell me this before?" he asked. "Why has your talent been left to slumber all these years?"

"Oh! the reason is part of the sad past," she said. "When all the bloom and sunshine were stricken out of my life so suddenly, many gifts and graces were buried,

which will find resurrection in the light of your love. Music in those early days was my one delight."

"And it is a delight which you shall enjoy once more to the full. My mother's piano has stood unopened since her death. Some happy day, please God, you shall possess the key of it, and bid its harmonies flow again. Oh! Reba, I get very impatient for that time."

They lingered over the piano, song following song, till the light faded and a moonbeam struck its white and ghostly silence across the instrument. Then her hands dropped upon the keys, and their talk wandered off to other themes.

"How I shall miss you this coming winter," he said. "Sometimes, as I think of it, I am half determined to carry you off by storm, and make you share my exile."

"And you really expect to go to Washington? I have hardly spirit to congratulate you."

"Yes; the nomination, in the present state of party affairs, is equivalent to an election. I am getting my business into proper shape to leave; and, no doubt, the first of December will find me *en route* for the capital."

"She was silent, pouting in a pretty way that always pleased him, and running her fingers absently over the keys.

"You begin to grow distrustful of me," he said. "I see it in your face. Shall I take a vow to remain faithful to you amid divers and many temptations?"

"No," she replied; "the more men multiply vows, the more I believe they delight in breaking them. But, dear friend, with so many excitements, so much all about you to dazzle and bewilder, will your heart still remain true and steady to its one love? Oh! it is so very, very hard for me to trust."

"Dear, you may confide in me to the uttermost. Since I have seen my way clear to marry, I have ever had but

one desire. Not fortune, nor beauty, nor wit, nor virtue, nor all these combined, could tempt me for an instant, if *love* were wanting. I am more exacting than you can fancy on this score. And if I marry for love, you are to remember I will have love. There must be no after discoveries of hardness of heart or blindness of mind; no frauds on the revenue."

She smiled at his eagerness. "If you can remember," she said, "that a woman, too, has her requirements, not exactly like those of a man, but equally exigent, and be as willing to yield as you are to exact, there need be no trouble."

"Reba, I want you, need you, every minute of my life. Let us be married at once. I cannot leave you behind."

"Now you are rash. We have both need of patience; if you can come back to me from this six months' absence, still true, still infatuated," she said, looking up into his face with a smile, "I shall have a deeper trust in you than is possible to me now. For this, if for no other reason, I would bar you from any precipitancy."

"I suppose you are right; but, oh! my darling, the excitements you talk about will seem very tame after these hours at your side."

They stepped out under the vines, and the stars, shining down through the whispering foliage, witnessed their vows of mutual fidelity and love. The hours wore on, the air grew soft with dews, the night birds called from lonely forest depths, and the breeze that whispered love to the flowers outside brushed the soft tresses of her hair against his cheek; but all the weird enchantments of the night were as nothing to the magic which lay in their hearts; and which wove out of the commonplace facts of their future, visions of fairy splendor.

"You have never been to the old home," he said. "Now,

remember, before I go away you are to drive out there some evening with me. I want so much to show it to you and to consult your taste about the refitting. We shall not commence it, to be sure, till spring; but you can be thinking of it meanwhile."

"I should like to go," she said; "it would be pleasant to wander with you over the scenes of your boyhood. I should seem to know you so much better for knowing your home. And that, it seems to me, just now, is about all I have to live for; to know you deeply and well, and to grow able to please you, and make your happiness."

"That is an odd speech," he said, quizzically, "to come from a strong-minded woman like you."

"It is a great wonder to me," she replied, "that you dare to take for better, for worse, a woman who cherishes the strange notions which you have so often heard me avow."

"The truth is, Rebecca, that I am less afraid of a woman who cherishes a high ideal of female attainments, than of one whose standard is set too low. I think you will be more likely to fill your life and mine with inspirations of courage, tenderness and truth, than if your ideal were a less noble one."

"Which may be, after all," she said with a smile of confidence and love, "only your way of subduing me; since a woman is ever as pliant as a reed in the hands of the man who fully trusts her, and whom she can fully trust."

He bade her good night then, and walked away, feeling more than he had expressed of the nobility and beauty of the woman whom he had left looking longingly after him, through the dusk. Love has an instinctive comprehension of this matter of the equality of the sexes. No man in the fervor of a love dream ever felt or asserted any kind of superiority over the woman he loved, except a purely material one; or ever refused to her, her rightful due of spiritual queenship.

XXXIII.

THE RIGHT OF A MAN TO WHIP HIS WIFE.

All through the Fall, Mr. Gladstone was very much occupied with preparations for his winter's absence. Beside that political affairs required a great proportion of his time, there was much to do to put his personal business in a condition to leave. But, while Rebecca, for this cause, found herself deprived in a great measure of her lover's society, she was never allowed to feel herself for a moment neglected. A note of five lines at one time, a basket of fruit at another, or even a flower left on her desk at the office, reminded her pleasantly, that, though the head and hands were engrossed with cares, the heart still, through it all, preserved a tender thought for her. Thus, instead of his business working estrangement between them, it became actually the means of knitting their hearts in closer bonds; for, though these little offices, in a purely practical view, seemed trifling and insignificant, they were tenderer proofs than the most uninterrupted devotion during hours of leisure, of the fidelity of his attachment. Because of the fineness of a woman's nature, these delicacies and refinements of love are vital to her; and many a woman has perished—gone down to an untimely grave, for the want of them. Many another has drooped all her lifetime, like a blighted bud upon its stem, folding from bleak and chilling skies or withering winds of sensualism, her tenderest graces in perpetual concealment; who, to sunny warmth, and free caressing breezes, would have yielded, how joyfully, her innermost charm.

Mr. Gladstone was one of the few men who instinctively

appreciate these things, and there was no danger of Reba suffering from neglect. But it happened in this wise, that the visit which he had planned to the old mansion, was postponed to the last week before his departure.

One evening, late in November, however, he drove to the door, to fulfill that long delayed intention. Rebecca soon made her appearance, looking, in her bright Fall outdoor suit, so cheerful and sparkling, that Mr. Gladstone's eye lingered upon her face with a warmth that was a caress in itself.

"Every time I see you," he said, "I feel less inclined for this long absence from you. Reba, if anything should happen to either of us, during our separation—"

"Now, my friend," she interrupted him, "do not croak. I feel so joyful to-day, so trustful of the future, that I would not, by any means, have you disturb my perfect serenity. The birds sing, taking no thought for the morrow. Why should not we?"

Mr. Gladstone gladly acquiesced. "In truth," he said, "I feel lighter hearted to-day than I have for many weeks. All my preparations for leaving are made; there is nothing left now to do, but to lay ever so many injunctions upon you, concerning your future peace, and mine; and that I propose to do at my leisure, during this long visit which we are to enjoy together."

She smiled in reply, and they stepped out to the carriage.

When Rebecca was seated, Mr. Gladstone proceeded to release his horse from the hitching-post. It was a favorite animal, of fine blood, which he had broken himself, and named Queen Mary, after the Scottish heroine.

"Look at her, Reba," he said; "isn't she a beauty, and doesn't she know her master? See how proudly she arches her neck! See how fondly she turns her eye upon me! I broke her after the Rarey method. She has never felt the lash upon her pretty hide; she has never heard an

angry tone in her master's voice, and she loves me almost like a human thing."

At this, the high-bred, delicate creature, laid her nose upon his shoulder, and, as if to confirm his words, gave a soft whinny of delight.

He looked up at Rebecca, and she was smiling mischievously at him.

"It is my equine enthusiasm," he said, "which amuses you?"

"Not at all," she replied. "I was only thinking what a curious reflection upon human nature it is, that the most distinct echo in our times, of the Great Apostle's doctrine concerning love as the foundation of all real subjugation, should illustrate the truth by an appeal to—horses."

Mr. Gladstone was silent for a moment, as if deliberately viewing the matter in this new light. At last he said:

"I am not a theologian, but if I were, I think I should resent that speech as an imputation upon the Church."

"The policy of the Church, toward heretics, for more than a thousand years," said Rebecca, "was to slay, burn, exterminate. Later, the church militant contents herself with denunciation and threatenings. The Quakers, to be sure, asserted the principle, two or three centuries ago, but they could not live by it, and are slowly dying out. In this generation, Mr. Rarey stands the sole and single reviver of the neglected truth, that pure, unvarying kindness is the higher law of subjugation."

"But, Reba, Mr. Rarey's method includes positive force."

"Yes, but it must be administered without harshness."

"The truth is, there are very few men who can practice the Rarey method, because so few are capable of the necessary self-control. That is the man's great miracle, after all."

"Yet, judging from his slight physique, and delicate, almost feminine organization, the power is not that of

physical force, or of the will, but rather of a spirit so large, so loving, so tender, for the dear object of his enthusiasm, that, however the noble brute may rebel, it causes him no anger, but only pity. It is love, after all, which is the overmastering power, enabling him to conquer, first himself, and then his horse."

"I begin to suspect, my little friend," said Mr. Gladstone, dryly, "that you have a private interest in this discussion. But you must remember that the right of a man to whip his wife is very ancient, and one which no man will be in haste to renounce."

Reba laughed. "But it seems," she said, "that you have already renounced the right to whip your horse. Let us be thankful for that. It is a step in the right direction."

"Ah! but Queen is very submissive without the whip."

"Less fractious by nature than most women, you probably believe."

"No; she is a fiery, mettlesome thing, else I should not like her so well. But she yields all her superior strength, and mettle, and fire, to my service for the pure sake of love, and a little gentle coercion which I practiced upon her in the early days of our acquaintance. You must not ask me to forget that fact, Reba."

"Since you insist on making the application, I will confess that I do not care that you should forget it. It is undoubtedly the duty of woman, as it is her nature, to yield implicit trust; but it is equally the man's duty, and as he becomes more enlightened he will see that it is also for his best interest, *never to betray that trust.*"

"Oh! since you yield without coercion, you spare me the need of the whip; but what has become of your strong-mindedness?"

"Let us be serious," she said. "A man is certainly the responsible head and representative of the family, and may, therefore, for all purposes of mutual use and benefit,

require obedience. If there were still any doubt, nature has settled it emphatically by giving to him a preponderance of will power. It is absurd to suppose that the weaker can or was intended to *command* the stronger. Yet, I cannot but feel that there is a kind of submission which is not incompatible with the highest freedom. As the citizen is subject to the law, and yet is only truly free under the law; so I think a woman may, during a whole life-time, yield a true and just obedience to her husband, and yet never feel her rights invaded, nor her conscience profaned. But, then, the man must be a man, and not a tyrant; not even addicted to that inherent vice of weak and narrow minds—the inclination to exact all possible rights, without yielding the corresponding duties.”

“Reba, have you any fear that your rights will ever be invaded, or your conscience profaned?”

“No,” she said. “I trust you perfectly. Yet, I think you must see for yourself, that many women do so suffer.”

“But that is the fault of the individual and not of the institution. In this, more than in any other way, it seems to me that I can trace the Divine agency in the ordering of the world’s affairs. The primitive institutions of the race are all good and true. The Family, the State, the Church, who but God could have ordained them? The reforms which are needed must be directed toward the heart of man, to bring it up to the level of those grand ideas which have their source in the bosom of God. They were fitted to man in the infancy of the race, and he may progress for ages and never outgrow them; though, age by age, his vision grows clearer and his heart purer, to appreciate them.”

They had left the town behind them, and were driving through open fields. The landscape drawn in the soft tints of the Indian summer, and veiled by its delicate haze, was one to charm the eye and touch the heart. The

pastures were sere and yellow, but along the old gray walls the golden asters still faintly nodded. The trees bore only a scant and fluttering foliage, which yet displayed some trace of the October splendor; the brooks, threading the fresher meadows, reflected the pale azure and paler gold of the tender sky, softened from its summer brilliancy, to an aspect more accordant with the waning fortunes of the year. Already the wide-spread acres of the Gladstone estate were in view. Already the great square chimneys of the old house rose in sight among the trees.

"Reba," said Mr. Gladstone, "you cannot imagine the pride and joy of my heart, as I look on these dear old acres and think that they are safe again in my possession. If I had never been so near losing them, I should never have known how much I loved them."

"Your fortune has been very singular in that respect, I think," said Rebecca. "I never quite understood how so strange a combination of circumstances took its rise."

"It is a long story to tell," said Mr. Gladstone. "In fact, I am still a little puzzled about it myself. At times I have had my suspicions that there must have been some unfair influence brought to bear upon my father; or, worse, some tampering with his actual intentions. But I have no proof of anything of that kind, which would avail me in a legal way; therefore, I content myself with letting the matter rest. The trial has been a severe one; but, now that it is over, I would not have escaped it. Life, and all that it holds for me, are ten times dearer than they could have been if I had not so struggled for my hold upon them. I, myself, am the stronger, better, purer man for the hard work which this experience has entailed upon me. If my brother Dick ever wronged me, I freely forgive him; if not for his own sake, yet for the sake of this indirect good which I have gained, and for that deeper

interest, our common mother. By the way," he said, "I had a letter from him the other day, and he is coming home soon."

"It is a long time since you have seen him, is it not?" said Rebecca, in an absent, meditative way; less interested in what she was saying than in her under thought of the grandness and purity of this man's life, and the pride she had in it already as a part of her own.

"Yes, he has not been in Wyndham for eight years, although it is only about five years since he went to South America. I fancy, from his letter, that he has not been so successful as he expected to be, and intends to return to his old home to settle for life. Well, we will give him a welcome; and so long as he shows a man's front to the world, he will have a man's place in it, whether he be rich or poor. A fine-looking man, is Dick."

"Does he look like you?"

"Not at all. I am fair, but he is dark, with a natural polish and princeliness of bearing which I should never acquire. But he has, or used to have, a bad heart, Reba. I cannot promise that you will like him for a brother."

"When will he arrive?" asked Reba.

"It is not quite certain. He may be here by Christmas. He speaks of renewing the old festivities in that case. Of course he does not know that I shall not be here then; or he may not come till spring. I should judge, by what he says, that he will not delay longer than that."

They had reached the gate, where the farmer stood ready to admit them, having already opened the house and left his wife in charge of it, till the arrival of its owner. As they drove up the wide, handsome avenue, Mr. Gladstone took great pleasure in directing Rebecca's attention to his favorite points in the ground, and discussing with her the improvements which he already contemplated.

"It will be some years yet before I can carry my plans into execution; for, besides the farm, I have nothing to depend upon but my own exertions, which makes me, as compared with my father, a poor man; but, with industry and good management, the day will come when I can realize all these dreams, and leave the old place, when I die, in better order than I found it."

The house itself had, of course, the dreary look which an uninhabited building is sure to gather. There were the inevitable dust and cobwebs, the darkness and the smell of damp and mould; but, as the shutters were taken down, revealing the handsome walls, and wide, fine windows, and heavy, antique furniture of the rooms, Rebecca felt that only sunshine and good cheer were needed to make it, not only a spacious and elegant, but a cosy and comfortable home.

They wandered about the house for an hour, Mr. Gladstone eloquent all the while with old memories. This was his mother's favorite rocking-chair; these her best loved books. In this room his father died. This other had been his own room since he could remember, and this his brother Dick's. Dick was such a handsome fellow, so grand in his manners, courteous to his equals, but haughty and domineering toward his inferiors. Men, unless they were quite of his own stamp, seldom liked him; but the women adored him.

"I suppose," he said, half joking, half in earnest, "there is no end to the hearts he has broken."

And so he went on, with the abandon of a generous heart, calling up old and tender associations.

Stopping for a moment in a chamber, Mr. Gladstone said:

"Wait for a moment, Reba, while I look in this trunk for my opera glass. It has been packed away since I left the small house, and I may want it this winter."

He knelt, and selecting a key from the bunch he carried, unlocked the trunk and commenced removing its contents.

The first thing brought to view was a blue silk dress. He grew grave, and was about to lay it silently aside, when, from some awkwardness of handling, the folds fell apart, and discovered great yellow stains of dampness.

"This isn't keeping well, is it?" he said. "Perhaps I'd better shake it out, and hang it in a closet."

As he did so, the ruin of it became more evident. The beautiful luster of the silk was faded. There was not a breadth of it that was not discolored and moulded, and the lace flounce, the one pride and treasure of Melissa's heart, was eaten to holes by the mice. It was a sad reminiscence, and the pathos of it was all the deeper, because it was so true a token of poor Melissa's life and memory.

There was not a word spoken as the ruined, faded thing was hung away; but a chill pervaded Mr. Gladstone's heart, which only a glance into Rebecca's pure, love-lighted face could wholly dispel.

The opera glass being found, they retraced their steps to the drawing-room.

"I am going to leave you here for a few moments, Reba," said Mr. Gladstone, "while I go up stairs to look for some old letters which are stowed away there. I shall only be gone a short time, and then we will set out for home. The moon is coming up gloriously, and we shall have a fine drive."

Rebecca, left alone, seated herself in a great reception chair, and commenced, in an idle way, studying the furniture of the room. It was quaint and old fashioned, but still handsome. What most attracted her, were the portraits upon the walls, done in oil, and with very creditable artistic skill. The one opposite the bay window, she knew in a moment was that of Mr. Gladstone's mother.

It was a face of rare delicacy, yet not wanting in strength; the contour high and open, the features regular; the hair, which was dark and softly waving, and the exquisite skin, expressing, more than anything else, the fineness of the organization. The expression was of perfect gentleness, touched with a sadness so tender and patient, that the heart of the beholder thrilled with an instinctive sympathy and reverence.

"Ah!" was Reba's thought, her eyes filling with tears, "she would have understood me, would have forgiven me, would have loved me;" and as she looked longer, it seemed to her that from the very canvas floated down a blessing and a caress.

The portrait of Mr. Gladstone the elder, hung there also; the face of a generous, open-hearted, yet upright man.

"Just the face I should have looked to see, from all I have heard of him," she thought; "tender, large-hearted, strictly conscientious. How could it have happened that he should have made so unjust a disposition of his property? I do not wonder that the feeling is so strong in the community against the half-brother. There must have been some undue influence used, which it is very noble of Mr. Gladstone to forgive so freely."

There was simply a head of Abraham in his teens; a bold, free, spirited drawing, which amused while it delighted her. It seemed so strange to see the boyish look on those grave, settled features which she knew so well. After a short inspection of it, she returned to her seat; and returned, also, to her idle examination of the details of the room. Presently, in one corner, upon the floor, she espied another painting, the face turned toward the wall; but on the canvas she read, "A portrait of R. P. Clavering," with the date and the artist's initials. At the sight of that name, the color forsook her cheek and

lip, and an uncontrollable emotion seized her. She sat for a moment powerless, the description which Mr. Gladstone had that hour given her of his brother flashing across her brain. The next moment there came a revulsion of feeling. It was no time now, she felt, for shrinking or uncertainty. Cost what it would, she must go forward and look at that hidden face. She rose and walked across the room, and bringing the picture out into a strong light, turned it toward her.

It was as if one had risen from the dead, to confront her with the memory of the bitter past.

The sun was just setting, and a flood of light poured in at a western window. Selecting a good position for the portrait, she placed it there, and then sat down upon the floor before it. She was lost utterly to the present. She was living over again, in her memory, the unspeakable agony of the past. The face she looked upon was younger than she had known it. There was a fresher glow upon it; a nobler enthusiasm; but the dark eyes glowed with the same deep fires; the strong lip swelled with the same firm purpose; the luxuriant hair curled with a foreshadowing of the same rich grace; there was, over all, the same expression of princely will, and power to do, without endeavor.

She sat there till the sun went down, and the shadows deepened around her; her eyes still fixed upon that handsome, fascinating face, something of the old magnetism drawing her out of herself, toward the scenes which they two had loitered through together. She knew, now, how heartless he was; how hollow his vows had been! there was no loving—only loathing in her heart for him; but the power he had wielded over her fate and fortunes, ah! she could not forget that.

Suddenly, the shutting of a door, in a distant part of the house, recalled her to herself, and to the present time and

place. Recalled her with a shiver of agony and fear. How should she meet that noble, generous man, whose footsteps, even now, were bringing him momentarily nearer her. Should she reveal this new discovery, or should she hide it in her own bosom. That she must give him up, utterly, entirely; erase with unflinching hand all the lines which he had drawn so deeply, so lovingly upon her heart — *that* she had felt from the first instant. But should she tell him the reason why?

"No," she said, with that womanly strength which is stronger than the strength of men; "the pit which this man digs ever beneath my feet, I will go down into alone. They two are brothers. That saint up yonder has an equal interest in them both. No doubt her heart yearns even more tenderly over the erring, the prodigal one, than over him who has kept always the right path. No man is supreme over my fate. Only God, my Father, has ordered it all. To Him alone let me carry my heavy burden."

She rose, put back the portrait, and turned to meet her lover.

"I have kept you longer than I intended," he said; "it is late; are you weary of waiting?"

"No," she answered, quietly. "I have been looking at your mother's face. I should have loved her. But we must not linger now—we must go at once."

He closed the door, and gave the key into the hands of the man who was waiting outside, and then, assisting her to enter the carriage, they started off. Rebecca felt that it was the last ride which they should ever take together, and she was very silent, very sad. Only long years of the patient practice of self-control could have given her strength to conceal her preoccupation from him. He, too, seemed quieter than usual, perhaps because the tender, haunting memories which the evening's experiences had evoked, were not yet laid in their accustomed graves; and

the landscape, washed clear of color by the flood of moonlight which overflowed it, and lying one wide, varied study of pure light and shadow, was not more subdued in tone than their manner toward each other during that homeward drive. Mr. Gladstone remembered it afterwards, and it seemed to him as if, even then, he might have known that a great gulf had suddenly hollowed itself out between them, out of which blew wind that was like that which blows from a place of graves.

One question she asked him; one request of his was graven deeply upon her heart.

"You spoke of your brother," she said; "what is his true name?"

"His name is Richard Peyton Clavering, though he was so constantly called Dick Gladstone, that even the old residents of the town scarcely remember that he had any other patronymic."

"Which accounts," said Rebecca, "for my never having heard it."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mr. Gladstone said, earnestly and gravely:

"Reba, you are my good angel, now. If ever you hear me speak unkindly or unforgivingly of this man, will you not remind me that he is my mother's son?"

The appeal struck deeper than he knew; but it did not sound the depths of that strong and tender heart.

"I will," she said. "God forbid that ever I should place dissension or bitterness between you two."

Her course lay plain before her then, traced by the hand of her Father Himself. Oh! could she walk it steadily, and without faltering, to the end? They went each to their homes. He to a quiet, dreamless sleep; she to a storm-tossed vigil.

What memories she struggled with that night, what temptations, what weaknesses, only her Father knew.

What angels visited her, strength from what fountains was poured into her fainting heart, He also knew.

When the morning came, she had resolutely broken every tie which bound her heart to her lover's. The only thing she leaned on now, was the Father's promise of peace. The peace of God's acre? She knew not. So broken, so humble, so weary was she, that she scarcely cared to know.

XXXIV.

THE ARK OF THE LORD IN TABERNACLES.

Ever since his illness in the spring, Moses Moss had been cloudily revolving in his mind the problems which that occasion had suggested. He was past fifty now; he was nearing the bounds of his life; the Hereafter would soon be a present reality to him. Was he prepared to meet it?

Very possibly these serious impressions might have worn off with his convalescence, if his patient and energetic wife had not taken great pains to preserve and deepen them. She had faithfully followed the doctor's advice, and by means of persuasions and flatteries, and various feminine artifices not transcribable, had, in a good measure, won him from his old tavern life, and quickened his mind to a new interest in a higher order of things. But still she felt that her work was only begun; and that, without the seal upon it of a Higher Power, there was no surety but that, at any moment, he might relapse into his old ways, and so all her efforts, and his strivings, go for naught.

He went to church with her every Sunday, now; but it seemed to him, and sometimes to her, that the services of God's house were altogether thrown away upon him. The days were long and warm; the sermons were pitched to a key which, strain his mind as he might, he could never bring himself level to; and the result was, he would go to sleep. In fact, it was a matter of congratulation to Mrs. Moss, if, by means of close watching, and sundry frequent nudges, she got him through the service without snoring. Moses began to be discouraged.

"It ain't no use," he said, "I never did get no good out o' meetin'-going, when I was a boy, and it's worse now, if anything. I don't believe I'm one of the elect."

But Mrs. Moss had not been drilled in patience all her life, by that turbulent brood of hers, to give up now.

"Moses," she said, "that's just a temptation of the Evil One. It may be meetin'-goin' ain't the thing you need. God doesn't work by the same means in all cases; but if we keep steady on a-tryin', it will come out plain by and by, what you do need. I hav'n't given it up yet."

And Mrs. Moss fell back upon that sure refuge, the way to which is deeply worn by the feet of sorrowing, perplexed, distressed mothers — prayer.

Toward autumn, there came rumors of a camp-meeting to be held in the woods near the town, in October. Then Rachel Moss' heart rejoiced.

"That's the very thing for Moses," she said. "I knew God was aware o' what he needed, and would send it, if I only hung right on a-prayin'."

From that day forward, Rachel said little about the camp-meeting; but all her plans were silently shaped with reference to it. The boys' new trousers were bought and made; Moses' black coat was put in order; the fall cleaning was all got out of the way, and there was an extra dollar's worth of sugar laid in to make cookies, and an extra ham bought to make sandwiches, all for camp-meeting.

"What is your mother a-drivin' at so?" Moses inquired of Jane, one day. "Seems as if she didn't give herself no peace, day nor night, now-a-days."

"She wants to go to camp-meetin'," said Jane, "and I think you might buy her a new gown. Mother hain't got a bit of ambition about fixing herself up, though she'll do for the rest of us, till the last breath."

"Lord, we can't go to camp-meetin', not to stay none," said Moses, "and I dunno as I want to go."

Camp-meeting, in Moses' mind, was associated with whiskey, and scoffing, and many things which just now he had a little fear of.

"Well, I guess mother will go, and maybe you, too," said Jane; "for I never did see her get set on anything, just as she is on this, but what she carried her p'int."

Mrs. Moss had a brother, a small farmer—a very small farmer, living a mile or two out of the town. As a matter of course, he kept a horse and wagon; a loose-jointed, faint-spirited, rickety concern, but still able to do duty as a means of transportation. The week before the camp-meeting, Mrs. Moss went over to brother Joe's on a visit. While she was there, she managed to get a promise of the use of this beast of burden for one day. Moses had his weaknesses, and would never, she felt convinced, walk to camp-meeting.

It was now well understood in the family what Mrs. Moss' intentions were; but as the day drew nearer, Moses felt his heart sink within him. It was a great departure from his old course of life, for him to go to camp-meeting in any other character than that of a scoffer and a reveler. He began to doubt whether, after all, the old ways were not good enough for him. He had lived in them all his life; what was the use in changing now? The crosses and renunciations which he had heard faint-hearted Christians talk about, began to loom up before him with great distinctness, and were full of terrors to his weak soul. His sympathizing wife noted accurately all the changes in his mind, and as the expected time drew nearer and nearer, she worked with a faith that was almost desperate.

On the very day before the meeting was to commence, Moses declared stoutly that he would not go. Mother might go if she liked, though he didn't believe in women tramping off to such places by themselves; but, as for him,

he never did know any good done by camp-meetings, and go he wouldn't.

At that moment, if poor Rachel's soul had not been firmly stayed on a Power outside of, and beyond herself; if she had not felt that every fiber of strength in the Omnipotent arm was pledged to her support, her courage must have failed. Instead of that, she spent that whole night in prayer. She repeated, over and over again, the good old promises on which she had leaned all her lifetime, and which had never yet failed her. In the morning, she remembered the old negro's declaration, "Ef de Lord tells me to jump *t'rough* a stone wall, I'se gwine to jump *at* it. Jumpin' at it is my business; gwine *t'rough* is de Lord's business!" Moses was very sulky at breakfast, and spoke of his day's work as though he meant to go about it as usual; but she, when she had cleared away the table, put out his Sunday suit upon the bed, and set one of the boys to black his boots. Then she calmly put on her own dress and laid out her bonnet and shawl.

"Come, father," she said, "it's time for you to dress, and I'm ready to put on your collar for you."

It was a desperate moment. Rachel could distinctly count her own heart-beats during that instant of hesitation. At last, Moses laid down his hammer and his lapstone, and approached the bed-room door.

"Seein' you've engaged the horse, Rachel," said he, "I'll drive you down there. But I sha'n't promise to stay to none o' the doin's."

Rachel fairly turned pale; but she did not otherwise betray her agitation. How she bustled about, though, to keep him busy till the last moment, for fear his courage should fail!

At last, the old red wagon drove up to the door, with its poor, cadaverous, resigned looking horse. If it had been a chariot of gold, Mrs. Moss could not have felt happier,

as she mounted it. It was not the triumph of success which so elated her, but of that inward trust in God which stayed her soul, and the all-sufficiency of which she had again that morning tested. Just as she went out of the door, she said privately to Jane, who was to be housekeeper:

“If your father and I don’t come back to-night, don’t you worry; and if we don’t come home all the week, don’t you worry. We shall come back when the right time comes, and not before.”

The camp-ground was a wild, secluded place; but lighted up with the October splendor, it had a glory of its own, unsurpassed by minster or cathedral. The platform had been laid, the seats erected, and the tents pitched in a circle about them, on a previous evening, and by midday the few late comers were properly domiciled, and the opening services were commenced. The seats were well filled with an attentive audience; up and down the broad promenade outside, the restless spirits who had come more for the novelty and excitement of the meeting than from any desire of spiritual advancement, constantly walked; while from the tents bright faces peeped, of women busy yet with household duties; and from the circle outside of all arose a savory smell of ripe watermelons and boiling sweet corn.

But over all the busy scene, the great trees spread their solemn arches, veined with a tracery of foliage more exquisite than any carved by mortal hands upon imperishable stone; the golden October sunshine streamed down through splendors of coloring, unrivaled by ancient pictorial windows; and the cool, sweet breath of the woodlands, and the aromatic incense which mother earth sent up to greet her children who had thus cast themselves upon her bosom, were a sweet smelling savor prepared by the hand of the great High Priest himself.

There seem to be some souls whose religious feelings are so enveloped by the husks and swaddling bands of an embryotic state, that only some sudden flood-tide of emotion, some resistless torrent of appeal, can penetrate to the germ and set the tide of life in motion. Such a soul was that of Moses Moss. The church, with its solemn services and spiritual exhortations, was powerless upon him; but out here in the woods there was a novelty and excitement of religious life which impressed him deeply. Prayer seemed to his materialized vision to have a clearer road to heaven up through these trees, than when it ascended from the church pulpit. The hymns, too, so full of rousing life and energy, sung by the whole vast crowd, sinners as well as saints catching the inspiration and swelling the full-voiced chorus, seemed to him a different and far more spiritual thing than the trained performances of the village choir. Somehow, sitting among those fervent worshipers, he caught, before he knew it, the spirit of their devotions, and began to feel a bursting and a riving of the bonds of his soul, such as he had never experienced before. At first the sensation was deeply painful, but that was the true sign, after all, that the soul was really quickened and struggling to outgrow its old cerements of materialism.

The sermon that morning chanced to be from the text, "Ye must be born again," and the speaker pointed his discourse with an illustration drawn from the forest around him. "These acorns which you see hanging from the boughs," he said, "are waiting for the frosts to ripen them, till they shall drop from the tree to the lap of the earth, perfected acorns. That will be their first birth. So you, my friends, were launched from the parent being, out upon this material life. But the acorn is not an acorn simply; it holds within it the germ of the future oak, which, if the earth receives it into her bosom, and the sunlight warms it, and the rain swells it to the bursting of its compact,

material shell, shall grow and thrive, and as the years pass on, add to the forest another tree, to this great beautiful temple of God, another pillar. That is its second birth.

“So you, my friends, hold within your souls the still latent capacity, it may be, but still the capacity, to be an angel. You are not the child of fate or chance, as the acorn is, but a free agent in God’s moral world. You may hug close your material shell if you choose, and shut out the sunlight of God’s word, and the rain of His mercy, and so fail of your natural development; or you may open your hearts this day to the influence of his gracious Spirit, and receive the spiritual quickening which you need, and begin to let that soul of yours out of its long, blind, blank imprisonment.”

Now, Moses could understand this, and see a truth and a beauty in it, which the doctrine of regeneration, as he had heard it preached before, had utterly lacked to his vision.

“Why, that is it,” he said. “Mother’s angel must have been growing—well, pretty nigh all the time since I’ve known her; and mine—I’m afraid mine is in the acorn yet.” But from that moment he did ardently yearn to be set free from his bondage.

It happened, as Mrs. Moss had calculated, that they did not go home that night. Moses was one of the first to go forward for prayers, and after that Mrs. Moss would not have left the ground without the assurance that those prayers were answered, if it had been to receive a fortune. The old dry husks of Moses’ soul needed a great deal of softening and mollifying before the spirit implanted within could burst through; but on the third day it was as if a little green shoot made out into the light, and a soul was born.

“Now, Moses,” said the good minister who had touched his heart at first, and who seemed like a very tall angel to

him, "it is a very tender plant yet, this new soul of yours; it will require much care; it will grow slowly, maybe; it will have seasons of seeming to stand quite still; but you know the oak tree has all the great, round earth to draw from, and all the great, wide heavens to spread its arms to, and your soul is just as well provided for. Never forget that; never lose faith in it, and God's mercy will bring you through."

But Moses did not want to go home now.

"Don't you suppose," he said to his wife, "that Jane will do well enough without us the rest of the week?"

"I'll tell you," said Rachel. "You stay right here, and I'll go home for an hour or two—any of the neighbors will give me a ride, or I can walk for that matter—and then I'll come back again."

It was settled so, and they staid the week out. When they went home, Moses was a very humble, but a very hopeful man, and Rachel was—the happiest woman in the town.

XXXV.

THE POWER THAT IS STRONGER THAN LOVE.

Blessed be God for labor! If Rebecca, on the day after her ride to the old place, had had no other occupation than to brood over her distress, her heart would, no doubt, have softened, her hand grown less firm for the work that was before her; but this morbid indulgence of feeling her circumstances denied her. The short sleep which she gained after daylight, refreshed her indeed but partially; yet she rose, bathed her face in clear water to remove the tear stains, and dressed herself for the duties of the day. It did her good to get down once more into the keen, bracing air of traffic; to feel masculine strength all about her; to look into men's faces that were nerved for endeavor, to listen to their voices toned to absolute command. It is the curse of women, in times of sorrow, that they are kept so apart from the sphere and influence of men. It is thus they grow sensitive, morbid, that their sorrows prey upon them to their own destruction. Rebecca did not lose all day the sense of the trial which lay before her. She knew that at evening Mr. Gladstone would seek her to say his last farewell before leaving for his Congressional duties. She knew she should need all the strength, composure, firmness which she could command, to still the moaning of her own heart, as she resolutely tore herself away from his clasp. Therefore, she crowded her hours with work as she had never done before; therefore, she listened to, talked and thought of, business, business all day long. When night came, her brain was jaded, but her heart was calm, her pulse strong. She looked back upon her decision, and knew that it was right, just, inevitable. To

do otherwise than as she had planned, would be frightful, monstrous. Why she was made to suffer thus was a sealed mystery in the Father's hand; but as she pondered on it, the words of consolation that have fed the spiritual life of the world for ages rose soothingly to her mind. 'As thy day is, thy strength shall be.' 'A bruised reed he will not break.' 'Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.' Hereon she leaned as on a staff, and felt such fullness of strength supporting her, as those less tried can never know.

When evening came, she dressed herself to meet her lover. Her hair was put back in a plain, quiet way, that yet became her. She chose a black robe, finished it with a plain linen collar, pinned with the cross of pearls. Her face was very pale, her eyes full of a deep and tender light, and the bright tint of her hair, contrasting with the whiteness of her face and the somberness of her robe, crowned her like a saint's glory.

Mr. Gladstone entering, and finding her alone in the library, caught the expression of her downcast face and drooping figure at once, but attributed it to her sorrow at his near departure.

"My sweet Niobe," he said, as he took her outstretched hand and kissed it.

But, as she looked up into his face, he saw something there which startled him.

"Reba," he said, "you are in trouble. What is it?"

She looked at him still, with that steady, tearful gaze; her heart swelling, her lips unable to frame the words she must speak. Her lengthened silence struck his heart with a chill; he drew her to him, as if to melt the chain which froze her utterance, by the warmth of his own bosom. She withheld herself from his embrace, and laying her clasped hands upon his shoulder, exclaimed:

"Oh! my darling," in an agony that was tearless.

She had never called him by that name before. He knew that only the deepest feeling could have wrung it from her lips. The unquenchable sorrow of her eyes, the tremor which shook her voice, and pervaded her whole frame, appalled him. He thought at once of the mystery which shadowed her life. It seemed to him that a cloud charged with the lightnings of heaven hung over him, and waited but for her speaking, to discharge its fiery blast upon his head. The gloom of this suspense, the vagueness of this terror, affected him more deeply than the most alarming certainty could have done. His strength, his very manliness were shaken to the core.

"Reba," he faltered, "I implore you to speak; to tell me what it is that has so overwhelmed you."

The sight of his distress calmed her. She felt that she had need of all the strength and firmness that ever woman possessed.

"My friend," she said, "I have something very painful to convey to you. It will shake, perhaps entirely unsettle, your trust in me. Therefore, first of all, I wish to assure you of one thing. However circumstances may seem to testify against me, I beg you still to believe that you have not been deceived in me; that, were my heart and my life open utterly to your inspection, could you look at them as God looks at them, you would find nothing there to justify you in a single reproach, a single tremor of distrust."

"Reba," he said, "I know all this, from a surer source than any words of yours. I have looked into your heart; it is only your life which you withhold from me. I am wrong in suffering you to conceal even that. I will endure it no longer. Tell me all, my darling, and prove how true my love is, how worthy of your largest confidence."

"Alas! alas! that you should ask me now, when it is no longer possible for me to obey you. My friend, I did wrong in that I ever supposed we could be happy together, with

this dark chasm of woe, and sin, and mystery, between us. God, in His providence, and in a way more emphatic and terrible than I could imagine beforehand, has shown me my error, and now I have to ask of you"—she hid her face; she *could* not control its workings—"that you will release me from all my vows; that you will accept release from yours."

"Reba," he said, catching her hand in a despair that was agony besides. "You do not know what you are saying; you do not mean it. You know well, that you are my life, my one treasure. I have waited all these years for you; for you I have toiled; for you I have suffered; for you I have triumphed; since, losing you, I lose the blessing of all that fortune and my own right arm have wrought out for me. Rebecca, ask me to die, to lay down my life at your feet, but never ask me, while I live, to release my hold on you."

Her bosom swelled, and she heaved a pitiful sigh, but she was still firm.

"My friend," she said, "you do not know, you cannot know. In this one thing you must trust to me. You know that I love you; oh! how dearly I love you no man can know," she exclaimed, in a sudden passion of tears; then, as she gained strength to speak again: "You know how lonely my life is; but for you, how utterly unloved; you see the temptation, you see the agony I feel in putting it away from me; do you think I would suffer all this myself, or inflict it upon you, if it were not imperatively necessary?"

"Reba, this is a case in which you have no right to be the sole judge. If this blow *must* fall, which I do not believe, there is only one way in which it can be softened, and I have a right to that amelioration."

"My friend, that is your error. If I saw that knowledge *would* soften the blow; if I did *not* see that it would only

render the edge tenfold more keen, believe me, I would this instant disregard utterly the pain it would be to me. I would confess all; but I, knowing all, in mercy spare you."

She had spoken purposely of her own pain, that he might, by all possible means, be restrained from urging her.

"Reba," he said, at length, "is Mrs. Darrell acquainted with this new determination of yours, and its cause?"

"No; I can tell no one. It is a secret lodged sacredly, indefeasibly in my own possession."

"I thank heaven for that; after all we have been to each other, I could not have brooked a rival in this matter." Then, after a pause: "You are treating me like a child, Rebecca. Show me something to do, to battle with, and prove if I have not a man's strength to defend my own."

"If you knew all, you would renounce me of your own free will," she said, "and I could not bear that."

"Oh! Reba, you will never know me. My diamond may have a flaw in it, but what then? It is a diamond, and I will part with it for no rubbish of too perfect paste."

"Oh! my friend, it is not I who have done this thing. It is God who has placed His hand between us. It is He who lays his finger on my lips, and compels silence. It is He who metes out this bitter cup to both of us, and bids us in patience drink of it."

"Don't tell me that, Reba; you shake my faith in heaven itself, when you say that. There is no Fatherly love, there is no God-like tenderness in such a dispensation as this."

Reba's answer flowed instinctively in the language of one of old, who was troubled beyond his strength to bear.

"'Wait on the Lord,'" she said, "be of good courage, *wait*, I say, on the Lord."

"Wait!" he exclaimed, "is there hope in waiting? Tell

me that, and I will curb my impatient spirit; but have I not waited all these years. Oh! Reba, it is too much. If God takes you from me; if He brings blackness, and desolation, and anguish, in place of all this light, and joy, and bloom, then I will no longer call Him Father; I will no longer believe Him the beneficent Being He proclaims Himself."

Reba had a strong spirit, but she shuddered at these rebellious words. Striving to soften and soothe him, her own heart grew soft.

"Oh! wait for Him," she said, "you cannot know His purposes, you cannot know His ways. I, to whom so much of suffering has come, have this testimony to bear; that, looking back over my life, I see not one trial, now, which has not been to me a most precious blessing. It cannot be that this, the worst of all, will fail of its destiny. Out of the bitter, *will* come the sweet, if we can but possess ourselves with patience, and wait the Father's time."

He put his arms about her, and laid his head upon her shoulder, and cried out piteously:

"Oh! my good angel, my tender, holy saint, how can I give you up? Strong man as I am, with wealth and honors, and a will to do in the world, I faint, I languish under this blow; while you, a weak woman, lonely, friendless, unsustained, are strong, and bear me up. I shall fall into a pit of recklessness and despair; I shall go all astray without you. My love, my life, I cannot give you up."

"No," she said, flaming into sudden energy, "you will *not* go astray without me, you will *not* fall into a pit of recklessness and despair. My one friend, I have loved you too well for that. The memory of these hours we have spent together; that, if naught else, will keep you from despair. Your hands have held mine, your lips have touched mine; keep them pure for me till we can meet

in heaven. Oh, dearest heart, grow great, grow strong, thinking of that meeting. Life is a shred, a bit of tinder under the spark; it burns out while we look at it; but heaven is for all eternity. Let us live for that."

"No, Reba, life seems very long and very strong to me. Its duties press upon me. My way to heaven lies through the thick of them; and in every stress, every emergency, I shall need you."

"My friend, God is able to bring you through. The way which seems so long now will grow shorter as you advance. I knew a woman once who was separated by circumstances from the love of her youth. She married afterward, was a true and worthy wife, a tender and excellent mother. Her husband adored, and her children revered her. But at seventy, while she was still a hale and hearty woman, with none of the childishness and infirmities of age upon her, she spoke to me of that early love. The girlish color came back to her cheek, the dim eyes filled with tears, and overflowed upon the wasted hands. 'Ah!' she said, 'he will be mine, I shall be his—in heaven. For the bliss of that reunion, *it has not been long to wait.*'"

He held her fast; he looked into her eyes, with a glance that seemed to pierce to her very soul.

"Reba," he said, "tell me this; *you* will not marry, *you* will not bear children to another?"

She laid her hand in his, and answered gently:

"Never, my friend. If ever the time comes when I can safely and honorably resume these bonds, which now are so painfully laid off, there will be no obstacle of my creating in the way; and yet, the time may never come in this world; and you, with your strong life, your fair fame, your broad field of vision and action, you ought not to fetter yourself with any impracticable tie, and I do not ask it."

He looked at her for a moment, and then turned away in silence. At length he said:

"Reba, you make much of my house and lands, and name and honors. Know that, for the right to call this little hand my own, and to appropriate to myself all that would go with it, I would renounce all these things forever. And this is no idle boast of passion, no gallant phrase from the lips of a headstrong, sensuous boy, but the full outcome of a strong man's heart. Reba, I love you; oh, I love you!"

The moisture of his eyes, the convulsive working of his features, touched her heart with anguish he could not know.

"It grieves me most of all," he said, "that you will not confide in me."

"Yes," she replied, "I know that, for the deepest sting of my own grief is, that I *cannot* confide in you. If that resource, that consolation were left me, my trouble would be lightened one-half; but, my friend, it cannot be."

At the first, the suddenness of the blow had overwhelmed him; and taking advantage of his surprise, she had borne him on with the current of her own thought and feeling, past the natural barriers and obstacles which he might be expected to raise; but now, as he nerved himself for the situation, and grew calm enough to make some effort to command it, they naturally recurred to his mind. But the advantage she had gained, she kept.

"Reba," he said, "it must be. You confess that to confide in me would lighten your sorrow; then I insist that you shall so confide, regardless of any other consequences. I am a man, you a woman. I would scorn an immunity from grief, purchased at such cost. It is unnatural, it is wrong. It is Quixotic, absurd, in you to think of such a thing."

"I was wrong," she replied, "in speaking so, or you were wrong in so interpreting me. I only meant that, if

it were possible for me to confide in you, I should do so with relief. As it is, confession would rack both your soul and mine with unnecessary pain. Now, when you leave me, you have still a world of action, of ambition, to fall back upon; a world in which you will be recognized, and wherein you will earn rewards that cannot fail to cheer you. Ten words that I might speak would canker your ambition, paralyze your action, make your world a desert, and I should be tenfold more deeply lost to you than I am now."

"Your imagination still busies itself with the empty shows of this world. Reba, they are nothing to me. Lean your head upon my shoulder, and tell me all that is in your heart; make yourself one with me in reality, as you have promised, and I will fly with you beyond the reach of this ban, this blight, this nameless thing of evil. We will wrench ourselves utterly out of this life which we have led; we will cast it behind us as a worn-out garment; we will commence the world anew, as free from encumbrance as new-born babes. Why, a man is no man, if he cannot free himself from an evil in which he has no actual part."

"A man, it is true, may defy the powers of evil; not so a woman. Besides, we cannot lay memory aside as a cast-off garment. If we take the wings of the morning, and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth, even there shall this sin grimly come between us, a shadow, a ban, a curse forever. Oh! my friend, if I looked upon it utterly as a dispensation of man's will, I should sink in the deep waters of doubt and unbelief. But I know it is of God; therefore, I dare not murmur. The hearts of men are in His hand, and He turneth them as the rivers of water are turned. When the time comes he will assuage these billows, and set our feet on dry land. Till then we must *wait*."

“And languish unto death. Reba, there is no force, no beauty, nothing to be desired in life, when you are taken from me.”

“Yet, still the world goes round; still the stars burn in their courses; still the sun shines on the evil and on the good; still God reigneth over all. Oh! my love, my life, what is one human heart compared with this great universe built up in God's love; this vast illimitable sea of being upon which we are launched. While duty, aspiration, God, are left, let no man nor woman despair. They are more than enough to live for at this present, and they will lead on to blessings untold, unutterable. You have a man's strength; let it first defy the evil of your own heart; its doubt, its unbelief, its despair.”

I cannot tell you how the hours wore on; how these two, having put mere human passion under their feet, soared into a region higher, more celestial, and drank of fountains they had never known before. The stars had marked the midnight watches before he left her; but when he wrung her hand in that last tearful adieu, the earth seemed no bigger than a point in space, and heaven lay all about them, wide, and free, and full of glory.

XXXVI.

A LOVE THAT WAS FREE.

Mr. Gladstone had a busy day, and at evening bade farewell to his native town in a very much graver mood than any of the numerous friends who accompanied him to the dépôt, and sent him off with cheerful admonitions, and good wishes, and heartfelt blessings, could have imagined.

All day those two lines had rung through his mind like far-off chimes:

“Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way.”

It seemed to him that hitherto he had been living in the vestibule of his life, which was opened by the door of this great sorrow, into a vast auditorium hitherto unsuspected. Already solemn purposes, sublime aspirations, strong endeavors beckoned him within; and he felt that if he joined them, clasped hands with them, he must leave much of life's airy splendor, its festal light and beauty behind him.

“Can I cast the shining charms of life to the winds?” he asked himself. “Can I trample all its gay and tempting fascinations under my feet? can I die to the flesh, living only to the spirit; take the world's burdens upon my shoulders instead of the sweet burdens of love, and home, and children? can I satisfy myself with this spiritual wrestling, this shadowy, spiritual crown; and all without her—in that dismal, shivering cold and darkness which the eclipse of her heavenly, yet human, face dispenses?” The whisper came to him as from that inmost cell in his heart where her sweet image was enshrined. “So shall she be nearest to you; so her smile be sweetest through hours

that were otherwise blank and bitter; so her memory and her love make bright and beautiful, what else no power on earth could make other than cold, and barren, and desolate." He gained in that moment some faint glimpse of how infinitely the powers of the spirit transcend the powers of the flesh; how the one reach down and fetter themselves to clods of earth, whilst the other stretch away through fields of light beyond the stars, and stay themselves at last on the infinite bosom of God. He shed some tears, he heaved some sighs, he heaped some grave mounds, whose nameless headstones were more eloquent to him than mighty mausoleums of lettered marble; but he entered the gay capital, with its dazzle, its fascinations, its shifting, sensual allurements, with a mind and faith as simple, yet as strong, as the faith of the Hebrew youth when he went forth to encounter the giant of Gath.

But on the morning of the day of his departure, the breakfast bell had rung at Mrs. Darrell's, and the family had gathered about the table, and there was still one absent. Mrs. Darrell said to Maude, as they rose from the table, and there was yet no addition to their number:

"My dear, do go up and knock at Reba's door, and see if she is ill. She is always so punctual that I really feel alarmed."

Maude came back in a few minutes with a frightened look.

"Mamma," she said, "I think you ought to go yourself and see her. She is ill, I am sure. She says it is only a headache, but her face has the look of death on it."

Mrs. Darrell hastened to her friend's bedside.

"Why, Reba," she said, "you are certainly sick. Why have you not sent for me before?"

"I have a slight headache, but that is all," said Reba, faintly. "Absolutely not another pain," she added, seeing the incredulous look upon Mrs. Darrell's face. "But I

do not feel very strong, and I think I shall have to stay away from the office, if Mr. Darrell will take my excuse to them."

Mrs. Darrell sat in silence for a moment. Then she answered very quietly,

"Certainly, he will do that. What shall I send up for your breakfast?"

"Nothing."

"Not a cup of coffee and some toast?"

"No, I could not eat it. If I am quite by myself, perhaps I may get a little sleep."

Mrs. Darrell went down stairs deeply troubled. The doctor came in, in the course of the morning, and she told him her anxiety.

"H'm!" said the doctor. "Ho! ho!" and then, after a few minutes' meditation with downcast eyes: "She rode out with Gladstone night before last, didn't she?"

"Yes."

"Went over to the old place?"

"Yes."

"Did she speak of going about the house? Did she see the portraits Marston painted there? You know he took the whole family."

"I'm sure I can't say," said Laura, quite at sea concerning the doctor's object in asking.

"I know she seemed very much out of spirits all day yesterday, but I thought it might be because Gladstone was going away. I even thought this morning that that, and her sitting up late, might have something to do with her headache; but she looks as I never saw her look before. Wouldn't you better go up and see her?"

"No, no," said the doctor, pensively. "I won't go up and see her *now*. Give her a little time; a—little—time. I will come in again toward night, and if she isn't any better, I'll see her then."

The doctor went away with his head bowed down and a very grave look upon his face. In the afternoon he called again, as he had promised. In the course of the day he had seen Mrs. Durfee, the farmer's wife at the old place, and had drawn from her in a quiet way all the facts which she knew concerning the visit there; among the rest, that "Miss March had been in the parlor alone for near about half an hour;" that, "standing outside on the piazzzy, she had seen her looking at the pictures. Dick Gladstone's was in that room, a-standin' on the floor; but she saw, when she went in to shut up the room, that it had been moved."

"Ho! ho!" said the doctor. "Richard is coming home, I hear, coming home. Didn't do as well in South America as he expected to. Is coming home to settle down. Don't know what he'll find to do in this town. It is a small place for a big man. Richard was always a—mighty big—*feeling*—man. Good morning, Mrs. Durfee, good morning. If Job's rheumatism don't get any better, tell him to come down to my office and I'll give him some liniment. Good day."

"The doctor," said Mrs. Job Durfee, "is just the pry-in'est man I ever did see. What airthly consarn o' his was't what that gal did when she was over to the place. It has just got to be a second natur' with him to squint, and pry, and dive inter things, and it ain't o' no more use than the wind's whistling." Which conclusion answered Mrs. Durfee's turn just as well as a wiser one would have.

That evening the doctor went up to Reba's room. She was lying on her pillow very white; and, as Maude had said, with the look of death upon her face.

The doctor felt her pulse, and held her hand in his a moment after; he asked few questions, but noted with careful, critical eye, two or three symptoms which told him all he wanted to know.

"Laura," he said to Mrs. Darrell, who stood by the bed, "you'd better go down and tell Nancy to get a jug of hot water ready to put to her feet. She needn't bring it up now, but when I am gone." Laura went down quite innocent of any suspicion that the doctor desired her absence.

"You must keep still," he said, "for a day or two, but not too long, Rebecca. It isn't best ever to give way to the feelings too long." He was holding her hand now, and leaning back in his chair with his eyes tightly closed. He had no wish to see the pain upon her face, which he knew his words would cause. "We can't any of us get out of the world till our time comes; but we must try to have strength to live in the world. I shall send you up a little medicine, which I hope will give you a start; and just as soon as you are able, I want you to ride out with me. I shall like your company, and it will do you good; do—you—good. Rebecca, a friend is born for adversity; I should—like—it,—if—you—would—consider—me—a friend."

The doctor opened his eyes just in time. His gentle tone had touched Rebecca's heart. The tears had been stealing through the lids, against her firm determination to shut them back, all the while that he had been speaking; but, at these last words, the flood-gates burst, and she sobbed convulsively. The doctor laid his hand softly upon her head.

"That's right," he said; "you hav'n't cried before, all day. It will do you good." He sat by her five minutes, perhaps, in silence; his grave, gentle presence, all the time softening the paroxysm of her grief. Then he said: "Now, I think you are relieved, and might better take an anodyne. It is simple; it won't hurt you. When I came in, I was a little afraid of a slow fever; but—you'll—get over it—without—now—I hope. I hope you will." He

took a powder from his pocket, and dropping it into water, placed it to her lips, and she swallowed it. In another moment she was able to speak to him.

"Oh! doctor Gaines," she said, "I cannot thank you."

"You needn't try, Rebecca; you needn't try," was all he said. "I shall come in again, in the morning."

He did come in again, and found that his patient had slept, and was decidedly better. She was very weak yet. In that night of trial and sorrow she had drained her system of its best energies; had used up nervous force enough to have sufficed for weeks of her ordinary life; but she had buoyed the soul of her lover up out of the slough into which it had threatened to sink; she had yielded him inspiration which should make him strong for months to come.

In three days time she was able to ride out with the doctor. In a week she was back at the office; pale still, with a look of sustained trial on her face which challenged attention, but forbade remark; but able to go about her duties without faltering or failure. She made no confidants; she noticed as little as possible the remarks which were made concerning the fact that no letters came to her from Washington. To Mrs. Darrell she said, quietly, "It is all over; we shall never marry;" to the doctor, still less. But she knew that he, at least, knew all. She could not tell how; she did not care to know, so long as his knowledge was her one unfailing comfort, and the source of all her human consolation. Again and again she said to herself, that, but for the doctor, she must have sunk. Again and again she reflected how much misery might be saved to women, how oftentimes their very lives spared, if the men about them would yield them just this pure, wise, disinterested friendship.

The short December days came and went, and Christmas drew near. The Puritan horror of this most blessed anniversary is not yet extinct in New England; but, year by

year, it is softened by the inroads of a broader and brighter faith. On this year of all, Mrs. Darrell felt that it would be a twice blessed relief to at least one inmate of her house, if the season should be observed with unusual ceremony. So a Christmas tree was ordained, and many otherwise lonely and sorrowful hours Reba spent in the midst of the children, devising and executing decorations for the same. But, when that day arrived, the joy it brought to the Darrell household, was poor and pale beside that which illuminated the humbler home of the Mosses.

Hitherto Christmas had passed over their family chimney, and had dropped there no beneficent Santa Claus. The eager little Mosses always secretly hoped, till the last, that some good genius, sprite or fairy, might alight upon their hearth-stone, and surprise them with a present of a "boughten" toy, or at least a piece of "trainin'" gingerbread; but, alas! none ever came. When the Christmas sun had circled the globe, and reappeared on their horizon, a Christmas sun no longer; when the last doubt was banished, the last, lingering hope dispelled, they always drew a long breath, and comforted themselves with the reflection, that at least they were no worse off than they had been two days before. Adversity had made philosophers of the little Mosses.

But this Christmas was destined to be a brilliant exception to all its dingy predecessors. On that very Christmas eve, after they had gone to bed, omitting, as a useless ceremony, to hang up their stockings, there came a stealthy knock at the door, and to the surprise of the two elders, it opened to admit Miss March and the doctor.

"Why," said Mrs. Moss, "this is surprisin'. Why, it's a'most as good to have you two come, as 'twould be to have a real Santa Claus."

"Ah!" said Reba, "how do you know that we hav'n't brought Santa Claus. See, here is a great bundle I received

from New York, to-day, by express; the contents of which I was to deliver here at nine o'clock. Come, Mrs. Moss," she continued, with true Christmas glee, "get me some stockings at once, and hang them in a line. I've got enough to fill all there are in the house."

Moses was listening with open mouth and eyes. "What the dickens do you mean, Miss Reba?" he asked, at length.

"Oh! I know," said Rachel, tears coming into her eyes. "It's my boy Theodore has sent it. I knew he hadn't forgot his home; but it's the beater of all to think that he should send us a Christmas."

She bustled about, half demented with joy, to get the stockings, stopping every half minute to look at the wonders which Reba displayed. They were simple, inexpensive gifts, for Theodore was getting small pay yet; but they were so well chosen, that it was evident he had spent a good deal of time and thought over the selection. A nice, warm *sontag* for his mother; a comical, colored pipe for his father; a comb for Jane; a necktie for Belinda; and tops, and dancing-jacks, and climbing monkeys, for the younger fry. For each one something, and just *the* thing which each most wanted. And such a merry, rollicking Christmas letter, too, as came with the bundle. It did them all good to hear it read, for Mrs. Moss got out her spectacles, and read it aloud, half blinded and completely choked by spells with happy tears.

"You mustn't think I've been extravagant, mother," he said, "for I hav'n't taken a penny of my regular wages for these things; but have worked evenings at such jobs as I could get, earning two shillings one night and four the next, maybe, on purpose for this. If I could only go home myself with the things, and see how happy you all are, that would be the crowning thing of all. But I know you will write me, and so will Miss Reba, and next summer, if nothing happens, I mean to come home myself."

There had been a little postscript to the letter, which Rebecca had not shown Mrs. Moss. In a pretty box by itself there had been a bracelet of Roman pearl, which he had asked Reba to deliver, if she thought it would not offend her, to Maude Darrell, with his best wishes. "It is not expensive," he said, "and the young ladies here wear them, and Miss Maude was always so kind to me when I was in her father's store."

Reba had executed her commission in a very quiet and delicate way, and had watched the color creep into Maude's cheek—Maude had her aunt Joanna's charming blush—and had indulged herself in a trifle of speculation about it; but she had not thought it wise to tell all this to Mrs. Moss.

After Reba and the doctor had gone, Moses Moss and his wife sat with clasped hands, and happier hearts than young lovers in their teens can dream.

"I tell you, said Mrs. Moss, "it is worth living for, worth being old and gray and worn out, to have such a boy as that."

"He'll do more in the world than his father has ever done," said Moses, pensively.

"Well, now, you needn't say that," said Rachel, "for you've worked and slaved, and gone without, to bring him up, and all the rest of 'em; and they're a likely lot so far; and the Father above, he knows that it's more to the world, and more wearin', too, to the flesh, to bring up a family of good children, than it is to make a fortune and keep it shut up in bank vaults. This night, I tell ye, Moses, I don't envy any rich man his fortune."

"Well, nor I neither, for that matter," said Moses. "The Lord has been pretty good to us, after all, Rachel; and what little we don't get in this world, he'll more'n make up to us in another, I s'pose."

Moses' faith was a tender plant as yet, but it showed

unmistakable signs of growth, and only the good Father knew with what prayers, and tears, and watchings his faithful wife tended it.

Of the joy of the children on that Christmas morning it is bootless to speak. It was an occasion long to be remembered. From that day forth, not at the home fireside only, but all through the village, for Mrs. Moss did not fail to spread the fame thereof with much motherly pride and joy, it was a settled conclusion that Theodore Moss was growing to be an honor to his friends.

XXXVII.

THE FLOWER OF THE AGES.

The winter passed, and Richard Clavering did not make his appearance, and all rumors concerning him ceased. Reba had once felt that she must leave the town before his arrival; but the time of that event seemed so uncertain, and the ties which bound her to this sheltering home grew day by day so strong; above all, she felt so little strength to go out again into the world, and make for herself new conditions and new ties, that she still lingered, comforting herself with the vague hope that this form of trial might be spared her.

As the spring opened, Mrs. Darrell's desire to enter the lists of Reform began to take definite shape.

"I have thought the matter over carefully and prayerfully," she said to Reba, one evening, "and this is the result: The field is white to the harvest; the laborers are few. They work in separate knots and cliques, as is best at present; one band laboring for reforms in dress and habits of life; another, for freedom in the world of labor and commerce and art; another undertaking to obtain civil and political rights. These are all doing well; God speed them every one. Yet there are two other points of vantage, one of them already partially occupied, which attract my more immediate and active efforts. The first is the field of medical science. The primary question in determining whether we ought to work at all in this direction, is: What is woman? What are her capacities? To what uses is she best fitted? To show what she can do, is truly to answer the question in one way; but to show what God made her, and with what intention he so made

her, is to answer it in a more direct and conclusive way. For this answer, we must appeal to science.

“We must have women thoroughly educated concerning the female organism, and its true uses; women who shall add to the knowledge already possessed by male physicians, a more intimate and farther-reaching comprehension and intuition concerning the primal and eternal laws of reproduction, than men, from the utter barrenness of their *experience* in the matter, can possibly attain to. These women must be, not altogether physicians and nurses, though that is incidentally a desirable end; but *teachers* in all that relates to woman's great transcendent duty, the proper generation and bearing of children. If the terrible and murderous practices of married women toward their unborn offspring are ever abolished, it must be by throwing a flood of true intelligence upon the subject, through all classes of society. And this it is the work of women to do. Nor is this all. The alarming proportion of deaths among infants is a reproach to the race; and one which will never be removed till every woman is so trained and educated to a proper knowledge of facts concerning the laws of bearing and rearing children, that she shall be able to give her babes the intelligent care which Nature demands of her as the price of their lives. A true and thorough knowledge of all these things is the natural and inalienable Right of Woman.

“And such knowledge can only be secured to her through the persevering and well directed efforts of women. No writer on medical science ever yet had a mother's experiences; knew the thousand and one subtile links which connect the forming soul with the maternal life. The deep, absorbing, infinite mystery of motherhood has been only superficially and oftentimes sneeringly observed by men, who looked upon it in the main as drudge work spared the nobler sex by a beneficent Provi-

dence, and branded all over with marks of weakness and ignominy and a fallen estate. Science only waits our reverent, trustful asking to refute all this; but she will never reveal these sacred secrets of womanhood to the impure, irreverent gaze of men. It is women themselves who must unlock the mystery."

"I have long been of the opinion," said Reba, "that the sciences of medicine, of jurisprudence and of theology, are destined to receive a thorough re-writing at the hands of enlightened, conscientious women. Men have laid the foundation; they have done and are doing such work as is fitted to them, with more or less praiseworthy zeal and fidelity; but beyond this, there is a range of investigation and discovery which can only be entered and profitably worked by the finer and more intuitional powers of woman."

"This very subject of which we are now speaking is a case in point," said Mrs. Darrell. "Physicians cry 'quack,' with holy horror, but what is the whole science of medicine, as applied to the female constitution, but empiricism, so long as the regular collegiate teachings in this matter are so blind to the plainest facts and deductions concerning it, as every intelligent mother knows them to be. More than half the physicians one meets, *all* the so-called conservatives of the profession, sneer at the idea of antenatal influences affecting the mental constitution of a child; while the commonest facts in the mother's experience are those which go to make up the irrefragable proofs of the law. Science depends on facts, not on *a priori* reasoning, and so long as the testimony of enlightened women is excluded and sneered at, I beg to know how these all-wise gentlemen are to possess themselves of the rudiments of knowledge on the subject?"

"But you mentioned another point, toward which your efforts would tend. I am eager to hear what it is."

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“It is the purification of society from its over-mastering sin of licentiousness. There is great outcry, just now, about prostitution, as if that were the main-spring of all evil in that direction. But prostitution itself is but an effect, a more terrible and revolting one, it is true, than society at all recognizes as yet; but still the legitimate and inevitable effect of that license which the men of all ages have claimed concerning the indulgence of their passions. In the early times, the right of man to make a prey of woman was unquestioned. Later intelligence has had feeble suspicions concerning the inherent and inalienable nature of this right; but men have ever been ready, with the most atrocious and blasphemous falsehoods, to claim divine authority and sanction for the abomination. Physicians will even unblushingly declare that the God of Purity and Truth has so made the masculine portion of the race, that impurity is an actual necessity to their physical well-being; while at the same time they carefully abstain from setting forth the undeniable fact of the emphatic and terrible seal of condemnation which he has set upon it. But, in these days, one need go to no physician or medical text-book for the proof of the penalties which men invoke upon themselves. Not only the newspapers teem with them; but, in a most literal sense, the very stones of our walls and sidewalks cry aloud with the story of their shame.

“Now, while women have always been the prey and victims of this state of things, it is also true that but for the negative support which it derives from their timidity and silence, it could not exist for a day. The bargain seems to have been, hitherto, that if the stronger sex would protect the weaker in the practice of virtue, the weaker sex would protect the stronger in the practice of vice. All this must be changed. As this advancing tide of licentiousness sweeps up into our very homes, assailing

the honor and undermining the virtue of both men and women—for it has come to that, that among respectable women of idle and luxurious lives, not a few of the devotees of vice are found—women who still stand fast by honor, and truth, and humanity, and God, *must* cry aloud and insist that not so shall altar and fireside be desecrated. Until women shall display the firmness and the moral courage necessary to this work, they will not be worthy of emancipation, and they surely will never obtain it.”

“Mrs. Darrell, it gladdens my soul to hear one woman of your position and influence talk in this manner; and I am all eagerness to know the practical steps by which you intend to reach that pinnacle of success which I can but hope awaits you.”

“The first and most pressing necessity is, it seems to me, to rouse the public mind to the need of such reforms. When I was married I had a portion of two thousand dollars, which, under Ralph’s admirable management, is more than quadrupled. To this sum Ralph promises to make a handsome addition, as soon as it shall appear that the practical prosecution of the work requires it. Our children will never miss it; or, if they should, may be better without it than with it; for I can but think that a heritage of pure and beneficent living is far better for children than much money. This fund, then, I propose to use for the following purposes: First, to incite in our Female Medical Colleges, and throughout the medical world generally, a more thorough study and *outspoken promulgation* of the fundamental laws of maternity. From college professors all the way down to girls in their teens, the light must be thoroughly transfused and made practical, until the great mass of women shall be made to feel, not only that it is murder to kill their children, but that it is also murder to bring them into the world under

such conditions that there is only one chance in a dozen of their reaching maturity. The cry of the innocents has gone up to heaven, and I feel in my soul that God will not much longer delay the answer to it."

"I like your plan heartily. Women have long enough given money to endow colleges for young men. It is quite time they began to do something for their own sex. Moreover, when women become enlightened concerning the significance and sacredness of their peculiar functions, they will no longer be the easy prey of licentious men, which they too often are at present; and by that very means men will learn in time to regard them with altogether a deeper respect."

"That is very true. It is the well armed man whom robbers never attack, and the libertine is equally cowardly. There was a time when I was half disposed to found a Magdalen Asylum, but a little reflection taught me that, while these institutions are excellent in their way, and ought by all means to be encouraged, they do not, after all, strike at the *root* of the evil. To attempt to stay the desolating effects of man's sensuality by means of such appliances, is like trying to dip up the ocean with a teaspoon. The remedy must go deeper, and purify the nature of the man himself, till he shall learn to see in woman a being whom his own best interests require him to revere and not profane. In almost all our large cities there are good women at work among the abandoned of their own sex. These women learn, from day to day, the most appalling facts concerning the hideous depravity of society in regard to licentiousness. They must be brought to speak aloud and shock the world, if need be, with a knowledge of its hidden sins. Then, and not till then, will a united, persevering, and irresistible effort be brought to bear upon this gigantic evil. Reports must be made, publications circulated, facts given, and the whole

subject thoroughly exposed to the public view. Truly is 'Mystery the mother of harlots, and of the abominations of the earth.' And when the apocalyptic vision shall be realized, and this woman in scarlet smitten from her high pre-eminence, the dawn of a purer era will truly begin."

"Mrs. Darrell, this plan provides for the use of your money. What do you intend to do with your mental power, which, it seems to me, is an equally responsible gift?"

"Employ it whenever and wherever, whether in public or private appeals, I can make it available. I have not the literary experience necessary to enable me to write a book; but I can, perhaps, manage newspaper articles, and these I shall attempt, not with any idea of winning fame, but with the sole motive of stirring up public thought. There are too many educated women who neglect their duty in this respect, I think. Who would be free, themselves must strike the blow! Our battle-field is as wide as the world. Let every woman, standing in the place whereto God has called her, use whatever power she has, steadily, earnestly, unflinchingly, and the result will soon be felt upon the world at large."

"In appealing to men, in the mass, I think we feel instinctively that they are selfish, and mostly accessible by means of arguments addressed to their self-interest. But it seems to me that the strongest appeal which can be made to unselfish, womanly natures, is the good which they have it in their power to bestow upon the race. Why, there are a thousand abuses which would slink away like thieves at daylight, before the influence of free, humane, enlightened Womanhood. Politics would become a business fit for respectable men to engage in; our criminal courts would cease to be the theater of foul wranglings and obscene personalities; our police courts, instead of administering a mockery of justice to the ignorant and debased, serving no earthly purpose but to sink those vile

wretches into still deeper depths of abasement, would radiate an enlightened charity. No man in his senses can imagine a decent woman sitting in such a stench of filth and iniquity, without crying aloud and raising the town for reform. There would be tenant-houses built, fit for beings with souls in them to inhabit; and I even cherish the faint hope that the time would eventually come when brothels would cease to be a necessary evil, and the hecatombs of innocent women, now yearly sacrificed on the altars of man's lust, would be spared to be useful members of society."

"My dear Mrs. Darrell, it is a positive pleasure to hear you talk in this way; independently of what you say, your eyes do brighten up so, your cheek gets such a glorious color, and there is every way such a seeming of strength about you. I should like to see the man who, looking at you this moment, would dare to think of your forty-five years, and sneer at you as an old woman."

"Ah! my dear, the strength is not in me; it is in the cause. I suppose, if the most insignificant man were to grasp the thunderbolt of Jove, he would become in that moment sublime. For the rest, I thank God that, if He spares my life, I have yet twenty years of usefulness before me, during which time I trust He will save me from the fate of sitting in the chimney-corner, knitting blue yarn stockings, and fretting at my grandchildren. Women have inventive minds, and when they have been released by age from the more confining duties of the home, the more active of them have sought out many ways of employing themselves; but it has been a great loss to the world, that so many others have been compelled to spend the remainder of their days in a slow process of rusting out. The woman who has borne and reared a family, has a knowledge of human nature, and of the ways and means best adapted to control and influence it, which few men

possess; and with her mind broadened, and set free from prejudice by an outlook upon public affairs, she might do inestimable service in the world. It is by no means an anomaly that the best political economist of the age is also the foremost advocate of the political enfranchisement of woman."

"It has sometimes seemed to me that Christianity itself waited to receive its grandest development at the hands of emancipated woman," said Reba. "Its sole essential elements are love and faith, and so long as masculine influences control the world, these can never be perfectly asserted and made operative. But it is the nature of woman to love and to trust. Whenever, therefore, the influence of women predominates in the world's affairs, Christianity will find its earthly home scarcely less congenial than its heavenly one."

"Ah! Reba, humanity is the flower of the ages, of which the calyx is formed first, and holds, in long and dark imprisonment, its inmost charm. But it is destined at last to part its bonds under the pressure of the inward expansion, and hold up to the Sun of the Universe the ineffable beauty of the perfected blossom. In this belief only, can the age-long tyranny of man, the deep, unspeakable agony of women, from the creation till these later times, be justified as the dispensation of a righteous God. The bitter tears of subjection, the heart-throes of anguish, borne in silence, concealed from all the world, were the needed dew to water hidden virtues; the proper nourishment for that divine germ which, in the fullness of time, should burst forth, the crowning joy, and grace, and glory of the world."

The remark touched a sensitive chord in Reba's heart, and impelled her, as deep feeling always did, to silence.

The new bent of Mrs. Darrell's life was not long in getting noised abroad. Of course she met, as she had expected to meet, opposition from various quarters; some

of it amusing, and some touching the deeper chord of sadness. Among others, Mr. Linscott was seriously shocked. The county paper was published in Wyndham, and a vigorous article in it, on the duty of woman toward reform, which he was certain could be attributed to no other pen than Mrs. Darrell's, irritated him so much, that he harnessed his horse at once, and drove over to Wyndham. He commenced his argument with Mrs. Darrell, by assuring her of the deep respect he entertained for her, a respect fortified by her years, her capacities, her position in the world; and of the great grief which her recent action had caused him.

Laura listened to him patiently, plead an imposition of conscience as her main defense, and received, in return, the charge of an offense against the proprieties.

"My dear cousin," said Mr. Linscott, emphatically, "it is not for ladies to lift swine out of the mire."

"Mr. Linscott," was Laura's firm reply, "if so many women were not compelled to *live with* the swine, *in* the mire, the case might be different. As it is, I do not see how any woman of leisure and capacity can possibly escape the responsibility of doing what she can, be it more or less toward crying out, that *there is* a mire, and setting forward the work of releasing its millions of willing and unwilling victims. For my own part, I do not in the least fear but what, if my hands go into the work pure, they will come out of it pure. There is a vileness which no woman can touch without being contaminated; but it is one which enters into the heart, not one which the pure heart goes out to overcome."

But Mr. Linscott was hopelessly fossilized. He had so long believed in the absolute inferiority of woman and her rightful subjection to the will, or avarice, or lust, or whatever else might happen to be the ruling principle of the man; had for so many years failed to see the breadth and

scope of that manliness which is greater than kingliness, and to which the heart and understanding of woman are ever so truly and so gladly loyal, that the new direction of things seemed altogether wrong to him. He could not comprehend it.

"I have always thought, cousin Laura," he said, vaguely, "that you were a happy wife."

"I have had my own trials," was Laura's reply, "as all women have, and all men also; but I have been in the main most happy in my domestic relations. The best strength in my arm and heart, to-day, next to the inherent strength of a great, good cause, is drawn from my husband's loving sympathy and companionship. He is to me as base to pinnacle; and no womanhood can be firm and noble, and point with steady truth to heaven, that is not in some way supported by a broad, solid, truth-loving and truth-living manhood. That is why, Mr. Linscott, I would have every true man and true woman cry out against the errors and vices which, handed down from remote ages, to-day so restrict and stultify the growth of the race. I would have the free spirits of all Christendom band themselves together, to secure for the race a wise, strong, pure manhood, and a tender, loving, pure womanhood; and until each and every Christian is willing so to labor, according to his opportunities and abilities, I do not see how he can consistently pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!'"

Mr. Linscott turned away with a heavy heart, to mourn over the degeneracy and willfulness of the present evil times; to declare that the world grew worse with every generation, forgetting the fact, that year by year it is drawing nearer to that glorious time foretold from the beginning, when all shall know the Lord, from the least to the greatest; and how can we 'know the Father,' except we 'do His will?'"

XXXVIII.

OUR BEST SOCIETY.

Mr. Linscott was married early in June. At the last moment, Miss Ridalhuber succeeded in convincing him that his health was suffering from excessive activity in his pastorate, and that a week at the Springs was the only thing which would restore him. By which means her prediction was verified, and they did go to Saratoga on their wedding tour.

It was quite late in the month before they returned to Jericho. The event reminded Mrs. Darrell of "the duty she owed to society;" which, now-a-days, has come to mean, not justice, nor mercy, nor yet hospitality, but is all summed up in the operation of giving a great party. Therefore, the Darrell mansion was astir with preparation. Cards were issued by hundreds; refreshments were provided on a grand scale; the whole house was put in readiness for invasion, and throughout the region round-about, dress-making assumed the form of an epidemic.

The long expected day at length arrived. Rebecca had remained at home, to assist in the final preparations, and at dusk, leaving the wide suite of reception rooms lying in fresh, cool and flower-scented readiness, waiting only for lights to emblazon their silence and elegant repose, she went into the dining-room to get a cup of coffee, intending thereafter to retire to her own room for an hour's rest, before dressing.

All day there had been a stir of anticipation, partly pleasant, partly painful, in Reba's mind. She knew that Mr. Gladstone had been invited, and had written to say that he should come, if it were possible. She had received,

as yet, no news of his arrival in the town, but there was an afternoon train; and, spite of herself, when she had heard the distant whistle, which announced it, her hands had faltered, and the flowers she was arranging had well nigh slipped from her grasp. But the occupation of the day had helped to preserve her mental balance. With this suspense and anxiety deepening every moment upon her, she dreaded to be alone. "Unless I can calm myself now," she said, "how can I meet him in the face of all these people, and maintain the proper composure." Every moment, her chances for getting through the evening creditably, and without attracting attention, seemed to grow fainter.

As she stood sipping her coffee, the doctor entered the room. His face was very grave, but it nevertheless cheered her. That grand, solid, substantial manhood carried reassurance in its very atmosphere. After a few minutes' chat, he said, in his kindest manner:

"I was down town to see the train come in, this afternoon. I met a friend of yours there."

Reba turned very pale, and grasped the back of a chair for support.

"It isn't worth while to get excited, Rebecca," said the doctor, slowly. "Mr. Gladstone has come home, and will be here to-night. His brother, Peyton Clavering, he calls himself now, will be with him, I suppose. I saw them both, and heard Mr. Darrell ask Clavering to come. It isn't worth while to get excited about these things. We shall get through the party well enough. You look tired and nervous. You must take a few drops; I'll send some up to your room; they're simple, they won't hurt you; and you must keep a stiff upper lip, Rebecca; keep—a—stiff upper—lip. There won't be any trouble. *I shall be there. I shall be there.*"

When Reba heard the name of Peyton Clavering, her

head swam, and the earth seemed to be slipping from under her feet. But the doctor's steady voice exercised a magnetic power over her, and by the time he had finished speaking, she was able to falter a few grateful words, to which her eyes added a mute emphasis.

The doctor took her outstretched hand, and pressed it gravely, and then walked away with a deep, deep sorrowfulness at his heart.

"What is to be done," he said to himself, "I don't know. Clavering is a man, and Rebecca is a woman; the little world of Wyndham, like the great world outside of it, will uphold him in crime, and frown upon her in misfortune. It isn't right, but that is the way of the world; the—way of—the—world."

It would be useless to try to analyze Reba's feelings for the next hour. For a time it seemed to her that she could never face the world again; that life, in the future, was wrung dry, for her, of every drop of joy; that only death could bring that sweet release from pain, which was all the boon she craved. How the soul struggles through such crises, only God knows. Perhaps it is not the soul which frees itself from those depths, fathomless to all human measurement, but divine strength which bears it safely on. Somehow, at the last moment, Reba came to feel this, to trust again the Unseen Arm; to see, in some dim, blind way, the littleness of our earthly trials, as compared with infinite strength and wisdom.

"Peyton Clavering is only a man," she said. "My father is God, and I will trust Him yet."

She dressed herself deliberately, and with an unconscious purpose of pleasing. Perhaps she herself could not have told whether it was the melting eye of love, or the cool, critical glance of disdain which foreshadowed itself most clearly to her mind, and proved her most effectual stimulant. Certainly, when she had shaken out the folds of a

lovely white grenadine, over which floated a scarf of finely wrought black lace, and twined a wreath of blue convolvulus in her hair, and taken in her hand her lace pocket-handkerchief and the exquisite bouquet which the doctor had gallantly sent to her room, she had never, even in the palmy days of her youth, looked more sweetly.

When she reached the drawing-rooms, the guests had already begun to assemble; and, at Mrs. Darrell's request, she assisted in receiving them. She had a presentiment, strengthened, perhaps, by knowledge long ago acquired, that the guests whom she awaited with so much anxiety, would be late; and at ten o'clock, when the arrivals were getting few and irregular, she withdrew into the shadow of a bay window, where she could get a waft of out-door air, and divest herself of all traces of heat and agitation. Perhaps, too, she had selected that spot for her retirement, because it afforded her a glimpse of the hall, and an opportunity to guard against surprise. She had not long to wait. For some reason she missed the moment of entrance, and heard first the low murmur which announced the appearance of Mr. Gladstone. As she looked up, the two gentlemen, both tall, handsome, distinguished; the one fair, with a frank, open countenance, the other dark, with an eye lustrous and piercing; the one in attire, simply a well dressed gentleman, the other a faultlessly elegant man of the world, advanced up the room to meet their hostess.

It was to Reba a moment of curious sensations; but, thanks to the doctor's warning, and perhaps, in a smaller degree, to the potent virtue of the drops, she was able not only to restrain all external manifestations of them, but in a dazed way to note the appearance of those around her. Mr. Clavering produced, as he always did, with that handsome face and courtly bearing, a decided impression. The younger portion of the party seemed quite overpowered by his presence, but Reba felt certain that among

the elders she could distinguish a slight reserve of manner, as if certain old prejudices existed in their minds not easily forgotten, and which even this imposing man of the world might find it difficult to overcome. More than ever was she convinced of this, when, having paid the customary respect to Mrs. Darrell, they turned away to greet old acquaintances. Mr. Gladstone was met everywhere with the open hand and hearty welcome; for his brother there was an abatement of cordiality and a reticence of manner which he could not fail to perceive. But, apparently, this did not in the least disconcert him. He was very quiet and exceedingly well-bred, there was no doubting that; and in his secret heart felt that with such resources as he always had at command, the prejudices of these simple provincial people were matters for his scorn rather than his serious regret. Still, if he was to settle in Wyndham, as he now intended to do, it might be well enough to show the "best society" of the place how easily he could disarm them. He was, of course, speedily presented to Mrs. Linscott. In an instant he felt his footing secure under him. A few minutes' chat with her, revealed to her practiced eye his superior accomplishments of mind and person, and the immense social prestige which he must wield wherever he moved. Mr. Linscott, watching the protracted conversation, grew a shade uneasy.

"My dear," he said, as he drew her away under pretense of introducing an old friend whom she had not yet met, "my dear, Mr. Clavering is all very well as an acquaintance, but there are some sad stories afloat about him. I should be sorry to see you cultivate him."

The bride looked up into the adoring face of her husband and murmured, with such a tender grace,

"Alas for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun."

"If such a charming man as Mr. Clavering, and so *au fait* to the best society, is not amenable to Christian mercy, I cannot imagine who would be. All men, *but you*, are liable to little lapses, you know."

Whether the shade of Thomas Hood would have relished that quotation, I cannot say; but Mr. Linscott was vanquished, and before the evening was over, his submissive wife was hanging on Mr. Clavering's arm, listening with evident delight to his honeyed speeches.

Meanwhile, Mr. Clavering, quite satisfied with his success in that quarter, had already singled out the next victim of his ambitious social designs. This was the stout dowager of one of the oldest and most respectable families in the county. Five minutes of respectful compliment, and charmingly ready memories of her early triumphs in society, and admiration of her daughters—present this evening, and quite radiant to their mother's eyes in back hair and pearl powder and glass beads—fastened her to his chariot wheels, and he already felt his triumph secure.

"As for this bevy of young girls," he inly said, "once I get among them, the only danger will be that I shall be crushed by their attentions. But, ye gods! who is that in the white grenadine, yonder?"

"He stepped back into the shadow, and surveyed Reba long and critically.

"Humph!" he said, one must move cautiously."

Appealing to his friend, the dowager, he asked:

"Can you inform me, madam, who is that young woman in white, just opposite? I don't recollect to have seen her in Wyndham before."

"That; ah! that is Miss Reba March, a great friend of Mrs. Darrell; she lives in the family. It is strange you hav'n't been introduced."

"A relative of Mrs. Darrell, did I understand you?"

"Oh, no, not in the least; quite a stranger; indeed,

between ourselves, too much of a stranger, some of us thought at first, since nobody knows anything whatever of her antecedents. But Mrs. Darrell was very determined, and we've all been forced to give way; she is really quite popular in society."

How much more the dowager might have said will never be known, for at this moment the doctor, who had not been an uninterested observer of Mr. Clavering's progress, advanced to speak to him, and interrupted the conversation.

Mr. Clavering replied to the doctor's cool greeting with rather more than his usual impressment. He remembered the doctor as one of the powers of Wyndham, and had, besides, some personal reason for respecting him; but, after the first few minutes' chat, he could not resist the temptation of going back to the subject which just now engrossed him. If anybody knew anything about this woman it would certainly be the doctor.

"This young protégé of Mrs. Darrell's, of whom I was just speaking to Mrs. Graves, is very interesting. I think Mrs. Graves said she was a relative."

"No," said the doctor, in his emphatic way, "she is not a relative, but she is a person whom we respect—whom we *very much* respect. She has been of great assistance to Mrs. Darrell, and Laura always expects her to be treated as her best friend. *We—don't—allow—anybody—to—slight—Rebecca.*"

"Thank you," said Mr. Clavering, gayly, "for putting me on my guard. But, doctor, really, your enthusiasm about this young lady has a suspicious look. You didn't use to favor the young ladies of my time with such emphatic praise."

"The young ladies of your time were not very different from the majority of young ladies at this time, except, perhaps, in the matter of back hair. There is a great rage for back hair just now."

"The fashions now-a-days do certainly provoke the suspicion that the ladies carry more on the outside of their heads than on the inside. The effect, on an exile like myself coming suddenly upon them, is rather appalling."

"Well," said the doctor, "there may be a doubt whether there isn't as much brains in back hair, as there is character in a rattan cane, or religion in a white neckcloth. There may be a *question* about it, I think."

"Really, doctor, your devotion to the fair sex certainly *is* suspicious. I must think that this unknown is exercising a more potent influence over you than any of her peers have been able to do."

"Rebecca has good sense," said the doctor. "She isn't over eager to follow the fashions, especially if they are ridiculous ones. It is not only good sense, but it is womanly delicacy that makes her averse to startling effects in dress. It seems to me that real delicacy is not so much a female trait as it used to be."

"Very likely not," said Mr. Clavering, indifferently.

The doctor walked away, leaving precisely the impression upon Mr. Clavering's mind which he had designed to do.

"It is really serious with the doctor," thought Clavering. "I should be sorry to disarrange any of his little plans, but if I find this old town as slow as it used to be, I may be obliged to enforce a prior claim to the property. What a cool way the little sinner has of going about the rooms without seeing me. I wonder if she thinks I am always to be ignored in that way. If she provokes me too much, I may let the light in on the doctor rather sooner than would tally with her plans. All in good time. Let us be circumspect."

A half-dozen young ladies were grouped around the piano, and the musical display of the evening was well

under way. There was a little flutter among this group when, during a pause in the music, Mr. Clavering approached them. Women are falsely accused by men who see only the surface of things, of preferring the society of libertines. The truth is, that women do infinitely prefer the society of men who understand them, and who use a knowledge of their accessible points with tact and skill. In the present state of society, men of this description mostly are loose and immoral in their lives, because men are so constituted that they must see some very obvious interest to be subserved, before they will devote themselves in just this self-forgetting way to women. Therefore, it often happens that the selfish seeker after unlawful pleasure is the man most pleasing to unreflecting women. This was especially true of a man so accomplished as Mr. Clavering. He had graces and artifices at his command sufficient to turn the heads of nineteen out of twenty of the girls he met. In provincial Wyndham he would scarcely have thought it worth his while to exercise these charms, if he had not known, what those good men who belittle female influence are too stupid to reflect upon, or, perhaps, too self-confident to care for, that each one of these young women might be of use to him in establishing himself in the good graces of the Wyndhamites. "Let me have the women of the town in my favor," was the sentiment of this man of experience, "and I can afford to snap my fingers in the faces of the men." And so shining out in his most attractive luster, he was not long in revealing himself as a hero to the eyes of these girls. He moved among them so fearlessly; he had such deft ways of turning music leaves, and arranging drapery; he looked into each separate young lady's eyes with a glance so delicately expressive of consciously superior knowledge, yet, at the same time, of chivalrous admiration and respect. If a

young performer were timid, he smoothed all her little difficulties with an easy grace, which at once inspired her with confidence and made her feel eternally grateful to him; if another were confident, he shared her assurance and bowed to her with a practiced air of gallantry and *savoir faire* that was a compliment in itself. It was small wonder that Mr. Clavering was a lion in society.

Presently some one called on Miss March to sing. Mr. Clavering's eye followed the call with deep interest. Reba was perfectly aware of the situation at the piano, and of the trial which awaited her if she responded to the invitation. For a moment she grew a little pale, and hesitated. Mr. Clavering's eye sparkled with triumph, and he stepped forward with an audacity quite easy to him, and was about to offer to conduct her to the instrument. He was a moment too late. The doctor was bowing before her with offered arm. Reba looked up, gratefully, and saw in the doctor's eye that it was wisdom for her to overcome her fears. With that stately column of strength beside her, it was not so very difficult to do; and when the doctor, with a good deal more than his usual gallantry of bearing, had seated her at the piano, and stood beside her ready to turn the music, she felt perfectly self-possessed, and sang with a clear and steady voice.

Mr. Clavering's quick eye took in at a glance the deepest meaning of the scene. He was enraged at any power which should enable this delicate woman, whose whole destiny had once been in his hands to make or to mar, even while he knew that she held the inner fortress of her soul impregnable against him, to face him with even an assumed independence of his will. He knew what this thing called human justice is. He knew that, while he had committed against her the basest sin, and that with the most aggravating concomitants, and her whole life had been pure of any crime against the laws of God or man,

it was still his manly prerogative to face the exposition of these facts with a cool, satanic triumph, and her womanly doom to be filled with ineffable terror and dismay. He gnashed his teeth to feel that even for this fleeting moment she should dare look a disagreement to these conditions. The song was not finished before his resolution was taken.

As she struck the final chords, he laid his white hands together and gallantly applauded.

"Miss March," he said, with his most deferential air, "your voice, charming as it is in ballads, has still, I perceive, a wider compass. I don't doubt you sing opera?"

She met his eye with cool composure, and slightly bowed her head. He held the music of "*Robert, toi que j'aime*," in his hand.

"May I beg that you will favor us?" he asked as he arranged the music on the rack. He would also have superseded the doctor, but that the latter would by no means be set aside at this stage of the game. A quiet glance from Reba's eyes had warned him to keep his place, and he would have done so against the charge of a column of cavalry.

Mr. Gladstone, who had been seeking vainly all the evening a word aside with Reba, had been attracted by the sound of her voice; but seeing what was to come, and dreading the power of such music over his excited nerves, he stepped out at a side window, that opened on the piazza, to quaff unseen his cup of mingled joy and pain.

Reba's fingers faltered slightly as she played the prelude. Too many old associations were connected with those notes, not to shake, in a measure, her composure. But her danger made her desperate, and when she struck the first vocal note, her voice had a sustained power and mellowness which surprised herself. She had not been carried back so forcibly to that old time for naught. The

golden quiver of melody which she had dropped there years ago, she picked up again this night, and sang as she had never sung before in Wyndham. There had been a murmur of talk as she commenced. It was quickly silenced. To the tender, imploring strains of the opening, succeeded brilliant roulades, passionate cadenzas, which were received with rapt attention, bated breath, which assured Peyton Clavering that he had simply roused this woman's spirit and paved the way for her triumph, instead of humbling her as he had hoped to do. When she finished, there was silence, and then a spontaneous murmur of applause.

"Reba," exclaimed Mr. Linscott, "how have you kept that imprisoned angel silent all these years. I did not dream you had such power of song."

She smiled, her face a little pale, but her eyes sparkling. She was strong now, and the doctor knew that he might safely retire.

Mr. Clavering saw and seized the opportunity. He had yet one shaft unspent.

"Miss March," he said, "there is a little Moorish song which I should like to hear you sing, if you are acquainted with it. It is a duet, the air of singular beauty, and the bass, which I will try to furnish in some imperfect fashion, is quite subservient to it."

He mentioned a song full of passion, and tenderness, which he had taught her years ago, and into which she knew he would throw all the fire and pathos which he could command; but she did not flinch. She felt a calmness and strength which she herself did not understand. "He may grind me to powder to-morrow, if he chooses," was her thought, "but to-night he shall know that I am no longer his slave."

She sang the song with him. Her execution was perfectly artistic; the sentiment was fully expressed, but

nowhere exaggerated; and not once, from first to last, did her tones falter. All the persuasive eloquence of his voice failed utterly to move her, and he knew that it failed. At the close of the song, she rose with the most perfect and graceful composure, and meeting Mr. Clavering's glittering eye with a glance as cool and firm as if no memory of passionate yesterdays was seething in her brain, she stepped aside among the group at the opposite end of the piano.

At that moment there was a general movement toward the supper room, which frustrated Reba's design of stealing out doors for a breath of fresh air, and a quiet interlude to the troubled emotions of the evening. The honors of the coffee-urn had been assigned to her; but, after the cups had been filled for the first time, she resigned her position on plea of fatigue, and crossing the hall and the now deserted parlors, stepped out upon the piazza. The dining-room, with its hum and stir, was quite upon the other side of the house, and here, among the glistening shrubbery, the night lay still, and starry, and lucent. Wafts of sweet odors, from the flowers beyond, came up before the dew-laden breeze, and in and out, among the roses and honeysuckles, the fire-flies came and went with joyous sparkle.

Reba stood for a moment just outside the window, her silver drapery glistening faintly in the light which streamed out from the brilliant scene within; then, gathering her lace scarf about her, she commenced walking up and down. As she passed one of the heavy, leaf-draped pillars, a figure emerged from the shadow, and a hand caught hers. She knew instinctively what hand it was, but she shrank from it with a sudden exclamation.

"There is then no fire left in the old ashes?" said Mr. Gladstone, sadly.

Reba looked up into his face, and spoke with passionate energy:

"I will answer you that a hundred years hence, when time and circumstance, and earth itself shall be beneath our feet."

He took her hand and drew her nearer; but she shrank from him.

"Reba," he said, "I have been jealous all the evening of the bright look on your face; the winged arrows of your voice have pierced me through and through. I could not have sung those passion-freighted strains so firmly. But your face is very wan and sad now. I watched you as you stood yonder in the light, and I know your heart aches. Will you rest it here on mine?"

"No, Mr. Gladstone, I will not."

"Reba, why refuse your own? I've touched no woman's hand since I held yours last. My lips keep your kiss sacred still. If you will not be my wife, must you still refuse my tenderest, purest, most devoted care?"

"Mr. Gladstone, I am no worker of miracles, that I can handle fire and not be burned. I do not misjudge you; I know that you would be my friend, my comforter, my helper; but it can never be."

"It hurts me so, my darling, for you are and always will be my darling, to see your pale, wan face, and feel that I cannot chase away the wanness and the pallor, and win back the light, the dew, the smiling curves again."

They stood for a moment, in silence, and a tear fell on his hand. When he spoke again, his voice had a different accent.

"Reba," he said, "one thing I ask, not as a favor, but as a right. Nothing which I could suffer could equal this torture of blind conjecture and surmise. Since we are hopelessly parted, and there is no crumb of comfort left for us, not even this poor show of friendliness possible to our two eager hearts, I must know the worst. You have no right any longer to conceal it."

She covered her face with her hands, and remained silent for a moment, stifling a pain he could not comprehend.

"Very well," she said, "God overrules all things. Come to me to-morrow evening, at eight o'clock, and I will tell you all."

"Reba, I have not pained you unnecessarily, have I? You don't feel that I am arbitrary and unreasonable?"

"No; oh, no. It is quite right;" and then her tears burst forth afresh. He would take no denial now; he drew her tenderly to him, held her weeping on his shoulder for a moment, kissed her as one might kiss a sobbing babe, dried the tears from her cheeks, and then said:

"Good night, my little one. Go quietly to your chamber, and hide the traces of your tears. Dream pleasant dreams, my own. The faith you gave me, when we parted last, I bring back to you to-night. God will not suffer love like ours always to go unfulfilled. Now that you have promised me your whole confidence, I feel already the strength of ten men within me. Trust me, there will be some way found out of this most painful labyrinth."

There were voices in the drawing-room, and lifting her tear-stained face to his, for the last farewell, she slipped from his embrace, and flitting around to a side door gained her room unobserved.

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XXXIX.

A SACRIFICE FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD.

Provincial Wyndham had not reached the metropolitan pitch of turning night into day, and as the town clock was striking twelve, Abraham Gladstone and Peyton Claverling turned their steps homeward from Mrs. Darrell's. They were each, in a different way, inwardly perturbed. Mr. Gladstone's agitation inclined him to silence. Mr. Claverling, on the contrary, was just in that state of irritation which made talking a necessity to him. He was not a man of great intellectual caliber, though his attainments were certainly creditable. His shining traits were all superficial; there was nothing particularly firm or stable about him, except his ambition and his will. To be crossed in these points, and that by a woman; a woman, too, whom he had won and worn, and cast aside, was precisely the kind of affront which he was most likely to feel, and to resent with the inconsiderate zeal of a shallow nature.

"A very fair entertainment," he said to his companion, "for Wyndham. Decidedly, the Darrells have come up, during the last eight years."

"Yes, Darrell has managed his business shrewdly, and his wife is a woman to grace any circle. A man with such a wife naturally grows ambitious."

"In the narrow firmament of Wyndham, Mrs. Darrell is no doubt a star. She has always borne an unblemished reputation, I believe."

"Certainly; so much so, that your remark sounds strangely in Wyndham ears. One would like to know what suggested it?"

"Oh! nothing, except that she seems to keep a very pretty piece of trumpery about her house. Miss Rebecca

March; ha! ha! that is a fine dodge for that old sinner to practice."

The June midnight lay dense and dark around them; even the fitful fire-flies had disappeared, and the drooping boughs of the great, umbrageous elms under which they walked, shut out the stars. It was well. No human eye noted the swift flush which passed over Abraham Gladstone's face, or the quick, resentful gesture of his arm, as these cool, sardonic tones grated on his ear. But a second thought arrested his hand, and even checked the words that would have betrayed him.

"You know her, then?" he said.

"Know her? I should think so. She lived with me two years as *belle amie*. She'll find out that I know her before I have done with her."

Then was made manifest the crowning glory of the masculine organization—its princely strength. There was no quivering of the flesh, no weak sinking of the nerves with surprise and horror, but, after the momentary shock, a calm, lucid comprehension of the facts, and a steady, orderly massing of the virile forces to meet them.

"I should like to hear the whole of that story," said Mr. Gladstone. "It is early yet for you and me. Let us turn in here at my office, and light our cigars, and talk the matter over."

If there was a harshness and constraint in his voice, Mr. Clavering was too preoccupied to notice it. The office was a tiny building, standing by itself, at a corner of the road, with wild ivy and a Virginia creeper covering its low roof, and hanging in festoons over its walls. Mr. Clavering was nothing loath to the proposition, and they entered and struck a light. Mr. Gladstone's mind was working rapidly all that time, though his preoccupation took the form, to the eye of his companion, of an eager search after matches, and a hospitable arrangement of chairs.

They were seated at length; Mr. Clavering in an easy office chair, with his feet tilted upon the stove, and a fragrant Havana between his lips; Mr. Gladstone a little back of him, in the shadow, facing his desk, upon which were strewn blank forms and writing materials. Clavering took out his pocket-flask of brandy, and passed it to his companion; but the latter had need of strong nerves, and imbibed very lightly; and that entirely for the sake of promoting the companionable feeling upon which so much depended. Mr. Clavering indulged himself in a liberal potation, smacked his lips as if the flavor of it pleased him, and set the flask by his side for farther use.

"The summer after I left Wyndham," he commenced, "I went out to a little village among the Catskills to spend a few weeks. The business which originally took me there is of no importance; the business I found there is the main thing in this story. During the first week of my stay, accident brought me acquainted with Miss Granger and her pretty niece. The spinster was a prim and starched old ironsides; the maiden as demure and captivating as one could imagine. She was kept, too, in very strict bonds; saw no society, except the few elect and sanctified saints with whom her aunt consorted; had no real company, except a cracked piano, and a few old books, mostly classics, which had been her father's. As for modern works of fiction, and the like, the old lady would as soon have permitted her to eat strychnine as to read them. The whole arrangement took my fancy at once. It was just the kind of sport that suited me, to break that old dragon's chains and let the pretty warbler go free. I had to manage, as you may imagine, with a good deal of dexterity. The spinster was wary, the maiden shy; but by going to church regularly, putting on a long face, and suffering her to lend me Alleyne's Alarm, I got around the first, and obtained permission to call on the lady-bird.

She has a fine voice, as you know; but she had known nothing of true culture at that time. I brought her music and trained her voice, and flattered her besides, with telling her that she ought to have Italian masters. There were moonlight walks and serenades, and much reading of sentimental poetry. All these things tell, you know, on an unsophisticated maiden; and in a month's time I had taught the little girl her first lesson in kissing, and had won her promise to marry me."

Mr. Clavering paused, removed his cigar, offered the brandy flask to his companion, who declined it, and then took a strong and deep potation himself. The liquor he had already drunk was by this time exercising a mollifying influence upon his temper; and together with the pleasant memories which his story called up, gave an exceeding glibness to his tongue.

"The worst was, that the maiden continued shy. Not that she was not in love. I fancy there are very few women who, under the circumstances, would not have felt the influence of such fascinations as I could bring to bear. But she was one of a thousand. Her father had been a Presbyterian clergyman of Puritan ancestry, her mother a Quakeress; and the daughter had inherited the demure ways of the one and the stubborn sentiments of the other. When a woman is in love, there is always some way to be found of managing her; this one was much too prudish to be won by any easy method, but, then, she was also much too pretty and too infatuated to be abandoned at this stage of the game. The difficulty, too, enhanced the zeal of the enterprise. My time was mostly on my hands then, and I lingered in the town a good deal longer than I first intended. The old lady at last began to be suspicious, but it was too late in the day. There was little love between her and her niece, and Emily was very much prepossessed in my favor. Of course, when the old lady began to

persecute her, Em clung to me with all the more fervor. I thought then the time had really come to strike a blow, but it was of no use. I dropped a casual word one evening to try her, and she blazed out in such a way, that I knew if I persisted she would forbid me the house, if her heart broke the next minute. I think my blood was never fairly up till then; but from that moment I swore to possess her. There was only one dodge that was certain to be effectual, and that was to propose a private marriage, and so get her to New York with me. She was a little averse even to this; but, by gentleness and fervent protestations, I finally won her consent. Then I sent at once to New York for Malbranche, and, under pretense of not being able to trust the clergymen of the town, I got her to drive over to the next village, where, of course, Malbranche met us, in a black coat and white neckcloth, and the thing was done."

Mr. Gladstone edged around more into the shadow, and Clavering, who sat turned a quarter from him, could not see how nervously his fingers worked with the pens and bits of papers before him. He was too well trained in his profession to interrupt a witness who was telling his story in an unexceptionable manner; but just here he interposed a question:

"I suppose you told her afterwards?"

"Egad, no; the best of the story is yet to come. That woman was always a puzzle to me. She's not at all like the common run. After I had married her—ahem! I naturally expected she would turn a cold shoulder on the proprieties; but, in the whole two years I kept her, I never saw a day when I felt it safe to tell her that she was not my wife. She would have left me in an instant, and it did not suit me to lose her in that way. It was expensive living in New York—that was my excuse, you understand—so I rented a little cottage up the river, and put her at house-

keeping, to which she took with the true woman instinct. I only visited her once a week, more or less, as I felt inclined. I intimated to her that, being away so much, I should hardly desire her to see a great deal of company, and that was sufficient. She snubbed every soul that called on her. I've seen women in love, in my time, not a few; but such a little fool as she was, you seldom come across. Why, just before we left her home, she came to me one day and brought me some papers; they were vouchers for her little portion—about two thousand dollars—which an old uncle of her mother had left to Emily after her mother's death, as a sort of expiation for the way the whole family had treated her when she married out of the society. It was just so with everything. She trusted me to the last degree. Malbranche had taken a fancy to her from the first, and went up there once during my absence, determined to undeceive her and try on the strength of that act of friendship to come in himself for her favor; but it was useless. Her indignation actually frightened him from his purpose. To have the keeping of such a woman as that, was, as you may imagine, quite a distinction among the fellows of our set. I invited two or three of them occasionally out to see her. I had taken great pains with her voice, and she sang them into the seventh heaven of admiration. Now and then, too, I took her into town to an opera, or a good theatrical performance; I bought her books, and, in short, made a lady of her."

"I should imagine you might have gotten quite in love yourself," said Mr. Gladstone.

"In love? Yes; for the first month I was rather taken. After that, her style bored me; but I kept the thing up just because there were half a dozen fellows dying of envy, and ready any minute to take her off my hands. She used to think sometimes that I was not very ardent,

and cry about it, but it never made any difference with her. She would have gone to the death with me till the last. After a while she grew mysterious and happy, and at last confided to me that she was *enciente*. That finished the business for me, and from that time I was bored to death with her; but I would not give her up, just because Malbranche was so dead in love with her."

Mr. Gladstone's face was very pale, and his voice was so husky that he hardly dared to ask,

"What did you do with her, when you left for South America?"

"Oh! I was hard up, and Malbranche had, one way or another, gotten my I. O. U.'s for a thousand dollars. For the promise of her, he burnt the notes before my eyes."

The blood was running hotter and hotter in Mr. Gladstone's veins, but he had not been made a man, to make himself a fool; he controlled himself, even forced himself to speak in a voice as natural as he could command.

"I think you mentioned that you had two thousand dollars or so, of her money?"

"Oh! that was all gone long before. I lost that at *écarté*. As I was saying, I turned her over to Malbranche, or promised to. There was a pretty scene when I told her of it. I went up there the evening of the day before the one on which I was to sail. In the morning, just before I left, I told her the whole thing, and explained the arrangement I had made with Malbranche. She fainted and cried and took on, of course, after the way of women. By Heaven! she wouldn't so much as take my hand to say good-by, after she knew it. I heard, afterwards, that she was taken sick that day, and on the next her child was born."

"You don't know what became of her after that?"

"Well, I have Malbranche's word for what happened. A more enraged man never lived than he was when he

wrote me about it, and I didn't blame him. Counting the thousand he as good as paid me, that woman cost him fifteen hundred dollars clear cash, before she left him; and for that money he never got so much as the chance to lay his little finger on her. You see, she was so affected by my going away, that she was sick in her bed three months, and during all the time he paid her bills, waiting for her to recover. At last she was able to get about the house; then he went to see her. They had a stormy time of it, but the upshot of it was, that she utterly refused to have anything to do with him. It ran along that way three or four weeks, till he found that he might as well give up the straight course, and try a roundabout one. That is the way women compel men to practice villainy on them. Malbranche was very honorable, but he couldn't stand everything. He pretended, at last, to be overcome by her virtue, but told her that the cottage she had been living in was rented to another party, and that she must move. She was clearly unable to take care of herself just then, and he would take her home to his mother's, where she would be perfectly safe, till she was able to look around and find employment. He laid more perjuries on his soul than would sink him into the hottest hell—if he believed in one, which he don't—and finally persuaded her. Then he thought he was sure of her, for he took her straight to old Mother Rosamond, the biggest she-devil in all New York; with orders to keep her a week, to hide nothing from her concerning the character of the house, but to let no man look upon her face. Malbranche's plan was to get rid of the child in that time, and break down her spirit, so that she would go with him willingly to a better place; for Malbranche meant to treat her well and keep her like a lady. But there was where he erred. He gave her too much tether, and I wrote him so. Somehow, it is a mystery to this day, how, for old Rosamond is

the devil and all, and she had an old hag of a portress, an African they called Egypt, who was a perfect tigress; but with all their care, that woman did get away from them on the second morning, and Malbranche never saw her afterwards."

Mr. Gladstone drew a long breath, but his face was still ghastly pale. There was a silence which it behooved him to break.

"Had she money," he asked, "with which to take care of herself?"

"Oh! no; but then she had a watch and a few valuable trinkets, that had been her mother's, which she no doubt pawned."

"You seem to have very little conscience about the matter," said Mr. Gladstone, with bitter emphasis, and a rising heat of manner.

"Oh!" said Clavering, removing his cigar from his mouth, and knocking the ashes against his boot, "I settled all that long ago. Prostitution is a necessary evil. The ranks must be kept full for the safety of society. It may as well be I——."

"Stop! right there," exclaimed Mr. Gladstone, springing to his feet with the stern and wrathful energy of a Roman Tribune. "Say one word more and I'll choke that stale lie down your throat. You have shown yourself a miscreant of the deepest dye; you shall not now cover yourself with the thin disguise of a public benefactor."

Clavering turned around, and looked at the flashing eyes which scowled at him from under those heavy brows, and the tall, strong figure, full of fire and action, with surprise not unmixed with cool scorn. He waved his hand deprecatingly, the splendid diamond on his little finger flashing in the light.

"Sit down," he said, "sit down; don't get excited over a little story like this. Why, twenty gentlemen whom

you and I both know, might tell you the essential counterpart of it."

"No, I will not sit down," said Gladstone. "I know too well that the lives of many men might furnish parallel cases; but this concerns *a woman whom I love*. I shame to listen to these brazen boasts of villainy, and think that my country's laws are powerless to avenge such wrongs. But, though this hellish iniquity might stalk unabashed through all the market places of the world, I thank my God that a petty crime, a thing which is, to this damnable contrivance of vice, a mere trifling misdemeanor, is still a weighty thing enough to let loose upon you the well-sharpened fangs of the law."

"Why, brother, you wax excited. What is this woman to you?"

"Simply the woman I love, and whom, please God, I will marry; and upon whose face you shall never look again, until you meet it at the bar of the Great Judge.

"These are brave words, brother, and need strong backing."

"They shall have it, too. Never call me brother again. For six months that tie has shut my lips. This moment I abjure it, and call upon her whose gentle blood created it to bless the deed. Listen, Peyton Clavering—thank God, you are no Gladstone—I have now a little story to tell *you*."

"On the 24th of that August in which my father died, he made a will, drawn by your hand, in which, after bequeathing to me, his legal heir, all his real, and by far the greater part of his personal estate, he left to you a legacy of two thousand dollars, in consideration of your kind attendance upon his last sickness, during the absence of his children."

Mr. Clavering had thrown away his cigar, and turned about in his chair, so as to face his companion. His

countenance was a shade paler than common, but quite composed.

"It is false," he said, firmly. "I never drew such a will."

"I say nothing which I am not prepared to prove," said Mr. Gladstone. "That document is now in my possession."

Clavering started visibly, but still kept the same imperturbable face.

"It was witnessed by Joel Ames and Nancy Barrett," he continued. "When it was finished, my father read it over himself, folded it, and deposited it under his pillow, waiting to deliver it to the family solicitor, when he should arrive; that functionary being then out of town, which was the reason that the task had been committed to you. That was about three o'clock in the afternoon. He fell into a doze then, and leaving Nancy Barrett by his bedside, you retired to your own room, where you proceeded to draw the form of another will, in which your bequest was changed from two thousand to twenty thousand dollars. You were sufficiently familiar with my father's signature to counterfeit it with good success; the plain, round hand of Nancy Barrett, also, gave you very little trouble; but the crooked chirography of Joel was more unmanageable. To surmount this difficulty, you adopted a dangerous expedient. Trusting to Joel's blunt wits, you called him into your room, treated him to a glass of cherry rum; observed to him that he wrote a singular hand; manipulated him with that devilish art which is so natural to you. Finally, under pretense of the singularity of his hand, and your long acquaintance and friendly feeling, you prevailed upon him to give you his autograph in exchange for your own. You, of course, provided the sheet of paper upon which it was to be written. At the time, Joel was entirely unsuspecting. Afterward, it occurred to him as singular

that you should have been particular to have him write it near the bottom of a page. It was a good many years before his muddy brain cleared up the matter sufficiently to make him positively suspicious. In fact, I believe, if he had not confided the matter to his wife, I should have been ignorant of it to-day; but, a year ago, he came to me, and made a clean breast of the affair. I searched at once for the first will, but did not succeed in finding it. A day or two before I left for Washington, however, I went over to the old place again; then, looking for another paper, I bethought myself of that old secretary which used to stand in your room. An indiscriminate search through it brought me at last upon a drawer, where my attention was first attracted by seeing the names of Nancy and Joel scribbled unmeaningly over various bits of paper. My suspicions were aroused, and a little energy brought to light the true will, which, with the unaccountable heedlessness of criminals, you had neglected to destroy, after abstracting it from its hiding place, during my father's unconsciousness, and replacing it with the forged document.

“When Mr. Denbigh, the solicitor, arrived the next morning, Joel was in the room, and witnessed the transfer of the document to him, and is prepared to swear, that—though my father said to him: ‘This is my will, Denbigh. Richard made it out, and Joel and Nancy witnessed it. It is all right. I’ve remembered Richard in it. I tell you so, that nobody need suspect me of being unduly influenced by him. He has been good to me, in Abraham’s absence,’—he did not look at the will. You were in the room at the time, watching narrowly the whole transaction. What I have said, I can prove. You know the state of the public feeling in the town, on the subject. Does the prospect of having this thing brought up in a court of law look pleasing to you?”

Clavering's face was as white as the wall. He rested his elbows on the table, and supported his head with his hands.

"Abraham," he said, at length looking up, "what do you propose to do? You cannot get your money back. It was spent long ago. Do you wish to bring dishonor upon one of your own kin?"

"Yesterday, I did not. Yesterday, my heart was all attuned to mercy. *To-day*, I would to God I had the power of meting out to you a tenfold bitterer justice. This is what I propose to do:

"This paper is a warrant for your arrest. With the break of day I shall give it into the hands of Sheriff Jones; a man tried and true, through whose fingers never yet a criminal escaped. You will take the early train for New York; Jones will go with you all the way; he will stay with you till you get your passage for South America, and he will see you on blue water. If, at any time, you look as if you *desired* to falter, he will lay his hand upon you, and claim his prisoner."

"But, Abraham, I cannot—I swear I *will not* leave this town so suddenly, and without explanation."

"*I* can make all necessary explanations; and *I* swear that if the light of the sun finds you in the town, you'll take your breakfast in the county jail."

Clavering was desperate. He sprang to his feet, and drew a revolver; but his excitement made his nerves unsteady, and before he could cock it, it was sent whirling out of his hand, and struck the wall. Abraham Gladstone picked it up coolly, and said:

"Dick, it is useless. I hold the balance of power. As my mother's son, I would have shielded you. As that woman's betrayer, I'll haunt you to your grave. If ever, after the rising of the sun, you set your foot in this town; if ever, after to-morrow, you show your face in any spot

of God's universe, which the laws of this land can be made to reach, and the fact comes to my knowledge; if ever, after this moment, your babbling tongue shall speak that woman's name, in such a way that I hear of it, I will drag you into daylight and set a brand upon your forehead that shall last you as long as Cain's lasted. Keep out of my way, out of sight and sound of me, and you are safe; but that is your only safety."

The bad man's face was haggard. His great black eyes and ample ebon locks heightened terribly the palor of his aspect.

"Abraham," he said, with bitter, but impotent rage, "I have not money enough to carry me to South America."

"Sell your watch and your gew-gaws, then, as you compelled that innocent woman to do."

There was silence for a few moments. Mr. Gladstone looked at his watch; it was three o'clock; the train was due in two hours.

"Come," he said, "we have no time to be dallying here. I shall go to Jones at once, and you may get your baggage ready as soon as you like."

"You won't give me a day's time?"

"In a day's time you might do mischief with your foul tongue, which I could not undo in a lifetime."

"It is hard to have that card in my hand and not be allowed to play it. It is hard to go to the dogs for a woman like that. Old fellow, I may outlive you."

"I shall take care of that, and remember you in my will. As long as you draw breath, you'll have the choice to be circumspect, or teach your slender hands the trick of breaking stones for the public good."

They stepped out into the waning night. Already the east was gray, and birds peeped sleepily among the branches. Down the fresh June air the rose-scents came blowing, striking the pallid senses of the criminal with a

sickening sensation, but carrying Abraham Gladstone back to the moment when, amid their dewy incense, he had parted from the woman he loved.

"Ah! I said to her," he thought, "God will not let love like ours be always unfulfilled."

In the rosy light of the morning, Peyton Clavering, with Sheriff Jones at his side, stepped on board the train for New York. The brothers spoke no farewell; but, instead, Clavering hissed into Abraham's ear:

"Before you marry that woman, I advise you to find out who helped her to get free from Mother Rosamond, and what she did with her brat."

It was a Parthian arrow, and it rankled as if it had been poisoned. Men require absolute certainty in these matters; and investigation, under the circumstances, was not a pleasant duty.

Mr. Gladstone went back to his room at the hotel, and succeeded in getting a few hours' rest. After an unrelished breakfast, he sauntered out into the town. The news of Mr. Clavering's departure was already abroad, but he met all questions with one answer:

"Mr. Clavering had received intelligence which made it necessary for him to go to New York, and he might return to South America."

Of course, nobody was satisfied, but since nobody could learn anything farther, the talk soon subsided.

It was late in the afternoon that Abraham was passing the doctor's office, looking moody and troubled. The doctor, seeing him from the window, called him in.

"You look down in the mouth, Gladstone," he said, after a little chat. "It is about this matter of Clavering and Rebecca, I reckon."

Mr. Gladstone looked up astonished and defiant. He was not in a mood to-day to be subjected to the doctor's prying inquisition.

"If I am in trouble, sir," he replied, a little haughtily, "my trouble is my own."

"I—don't—want—to meddle—in your affairs—for—evil," said the doctor. "I liked your father, and your grandfather, Gladstone, and I don't bear you any ill-will. Three or four years ago, I saw Marston in New York, and learned from him some things I thought you might like to know. Clavering told you part of it, I reckon?"

"Yes," said Abraham, resignedly; feeling that if the doctor already knew all, there was no more to be said; only in his heart he cursed the inquisitiveness which had brought him the knowledge.

"Did he tell you how the girl got away from old Rosamond?"

"No," said Abraham, with a little more interest. "Did you learn that?"

"I thought as like as not I knew some things he could not tell you. Rebecca is a good woman. It was hard luck to fall into Clavering's hands, but she is a good woman; an innocent woman, for all that I can see, as any other. I saw Marston, and I saw Malbranche, and I saw old Rosamond afterward. I got it all out of them without their even suspecting that I was interested in the woman, and they all told one story. The girl was duped. She was dev-il-ish-ly duped. I—don't—mean—that—for—swearing. I mean it for literal fact—*devilishly duped!* But women are women, the world over—bad ones and all. There was a girl in the house who had had her baby stolen from her, just as they meant to steal Rebecca's baby; and she warned Rebecca, and bribed old Egypt with a glass of gin to go out upon some errand for her. She drugged the gin, and then instructed Rebecca how to unfasten the door and get out. It all came out afterward, for the girl boasted of her revenge, after she had left Rosamond's house."

"And the baby?" asked Gladstone.

The doctor looked down, and twirled his thumbs, and whistled —

"I don't *know*, but I always *suspected* that the little Catherine I brought from New York, was the baby. Her clothes were marked with a 'C,' and I found her the very morning that Rebecca got away from old Rosamond. I am certain of that. Besides, she had a look like Clavering when you thought about it."

Mr. Gladstone rose and grasped the doctor's hand, with moist eyes, and a choking in his throat which made speech impossible for the minute.

"I can guess how you feel," said the doctor. "It isn't best to have any uncertainty in these matters. I never said anything about this before, and I shouldn't have now, but I was afraid you'd be going down to New York to ask questions, that you'd better not ask. Nobody thinks anything about it there now. It has all blown over. I suspect you sent Clavering off on that old business about the will?"

"How *did* you know that?" asked Gladstone.

"Oh! Yankees *will* guess, you know. I saw through the rest of it plain enough, and I *supposed* that must be your handle to get him out of the way. It isn't any more than I expected. I had a conversation with Joel once that let a little light into my mind. If he is out of the way for good, what's to hinder your marrying Rebecca?"

It was said simply, with an innocent uplifting of the eyes, that made Abraham smile.

"Well," he said, "the last time I talked it over with her, she wouldn't have me. I'm going to see her about it again this evening."

"That's right," said the doctor. "*That — is — right.*"

XL.

TWO EQUAL SOULS: ONE ROUND, PERFECTED WHOLE.

The sun shining into her chamber, woke Reba on the morning after the party. She had slept soundly, and felt unexpectedly refreshed. Looking out upon the broad expanse of valley and upland, which stretched away before her, rioting in its June luxuriance of waving grain and green and fruitful orchard; the blue sky as clear as sapphire, and the sunshine golden, like the streets of the New Jerusalem, over all—she felt a strong uplifting of her soul, which seemed to set at naught the darkness and pain of the night before. Her feeling was something which she could not at all understand. Reason and logic were at fault to account for it, but, there it was, a strong, free, buoyant influence in her soul, when all her outward circumstances seemed to tend to weakness, and depression, and slavery.

“Well,” she said, “God is good, and never leaves me without some grain of comfort. If the world were swept free of all evil, and made ready for the millennial morning, I should hardly feel lighter of heart than I do. The cloud will come soon enough; let me enjoy the sunshine while I may.”

Bending quietly over her desk in the office, all day, it happened that no whisper of the rumors outside, in the town, reached her ear. When her work was done, she walked home, and asking Nancy to send a cup of tea to her room, did not go down stairs at all, till the door-bell rang, and she knew that Mr. Gladstone had come. For the last hour she had been thinking steadily of the thing she had promised to do, recalling the old scenes, exhuming bitter and piercing memories. It was not a cheerful task.

All her soul shrank from it. With the knowledge she had of men, she could not be at all certain that she could so fulfill her promise as to retain, unimpaired, even the respect of her lover. It is excoriating to a woman's pride to know that she has innocently suffered a wrong at the hands of a man, which not only deprives her of the sympathy of her own sex, but of the respect of men. There is an injustice and unnaturalness about the fact, which adds the sharpest sting to pain.

But Mr. Gladstone awaited her below, and there was no longer any reason for delay. She went down the stairs, and entered his presence, her head drooping like a penitent, and her bosom heaving with unuttered sighs. She felt his arm around her, and her chin lifted for the kiss upon her forehead, but she had no courage to look into his eyes. She strove to withdraw herself, but the arm still held her fast.

"Reba," he said, "will you not look at me? My wounded, martyred darling, can you not see in my eyes the eternal love my soul bears for you?"

She looked up then with surprise and terror.

"Oh! you know it," she said; "he has told you." She took his hands in both hers, and strove to free herself.

"No," he said, "you shall not take yourself away from me. Listen, Reba; that bad man is far away from here. You nor I shall ever see his face again, and it is between us as if he had never been. Is it not, love?"

She looked humbly into his eyes; she buried her face in her hands, and silently wept.

"Darling, when we parted last winter, you bade me have faith in God. I, alas, was faithless, but you believed. Behold here the full and perfect fulfillment of your trust."

"Knowing it all—*all*, you do not scorn me?"

He looked down into her eager eyes and smiled for a reply.

"Let us talk about it a little, Reba," he said. "I want you to tell me if you never suspected the truth concerning your relations with him."

"Never, till the moment when he himself assured me that I was not his wife. After the first few months, I knew very well that he did not love me, that I had been basely deceived in him; yet he was kind in many ways; seemed to be proud of me, and at times fond of me. I believed myself his wife; and whatever I suffered, I took it all as part of my wifely lot. Oh! and I did suffer, only God knows how much, from his coarseness and neglect."

Then he told her all that had happened the night before, and explained to her how it was that she was wholly free from the man who had betrayed her.

"And, darling," he said, "if I had any regret for the money which he wrongfully took from me, it is all gone now. I thank him for the deed, since, in return for it, I have you. Reba, look up, and be cheerful."

Her head was drooping, and the tears flowed silently.

"Did he tell you," she said, "about my little baby?"

"Yes, dear. There are some things that happened after he left, that I want to know about; but I would not have mentioned them this evening, if you had not."

"It will do me good to tell you all about it. I was not able to leave my room for three months. When I was, the first thing I did was to go out among my neighbors, in the little village in which I had lived, and try to get employment. But I was not strong, I had my babe to care for, and of course I was not a promising competitor for work. Worse than that, the people had all along suspected my real position, and because, in accordance with Mr. Clavering's desire, I had not cultivated any acquaintance with them, they were slow to believe in me. A few women looked pitifully upon me, but more of them treated me with contempt. I soon felt that I had nothing

to hope for from them. Then I appealed to the minister of the parish. He told me he was sorry for me, but saw nothing which he could do. It would be very easy for him to injure his reputation, without doing me any good; but he referred me to a leading man in his parish, a man of wealth, who could assist me, if he chose, and who had a reputation for charity. I went to him. Well, I never applied to a man again."

"Reba, you shall tell me what he said to you; I want to know."

"He said that I was far too pretty to work for a living, and if I would accept his *protection*, I should live like a lady."

"Well, my child, it is my firm conviction, that, if you had had no more moral strength than most men have, you would not have scorned his offer. When the whole enginery of male power and privilege must be used to debauch women, it is a hard thing to say that they are just as prone to evil as men are."

"If my suffering is sufficient to make one man, with the power and prestige which you possess, the firm, unwavering, unselfish champion of woman, then I bless God that He has made me the instrument of so much good."

"But to go on with my story. I spent a month in these endeavors, subject to the frequent visits of Malbranche. I should have left the town, but I was not strong enough to walk and carry my child; and I could not, in that small place, convert my jewelry into money. At length, Malbranche appeared to relent. He swore to me, again and again, that he meant fairly and honorably by me, and that, if I would go with him to his mother's house, I should be well treated, till I could find some means of earning my own living. My aunt was dead, I should have told you before, and I had not a relative in the world to whom I could turn for help."

“Oh! my friend, what happened to me thereafter, I cannot now find strength to think about. Thank God, the worst was spared me. I found a friend, even in that direful extremity. I had not been in the house six hours till a girl named Lettie warned me of the plot to steal my baby from me, and then compel me to sin. Oh! when I think of that moment, I do not wonder that women fall. Deserted by everything in the shape of human flesh, but this one poor creature, who was herself the victim of despair; shut into the lowest depths of hell, it seemed to me; the helpless, innocent babe in my arms about to be torn from me, it seemed as if my brain must give way, and my soul succumb to despair. I tell you, my friend, the miracle of my story is not that I was so shamefully betrayed—that happens every day, to women as good and pure as I—but it is that I was ever saved. That, I own, is an almost incredible marvel. A pestilence breaks forth in the land, and a few hundreds of men and women are swept off into eternity; and men bestir themselves, and spend money like water, to find means to check the evil; ministers pray in their churches, the people fast in their homes, and God is besought day and night to spare His children. But there is an agency abroad which slays women by thousands every year. It is armed with all the enginery which the ingenuity of men can invent; it has more gold at its back than the treasury of the nation; it has voices in legislative halls; it has agents in the police of every city; and yet men and women sleep easily in their beds, and never think of petitioning heaven to interfere for the salvation of the souls and bodies of their children. Nay, if you talk to them about it, they will tell you that this giant evil is a necessity imposed by heaven upon the race. If blasphemy can go farther than that, there must be a deeper hell than a brothel, which I do not believe.”

Mr. Gladstone heard in silence.

"Reba," he said, at length, "one man's arm is very weak to contend with this great evil; but I see to-day, as I never did before, the necessity of putting power into the hands of women to avenge their own wrongs. When women cease to be considered the inferior sex, they will cease to be looked upon as the lawful prey of the unlawful passions of men; and here, with your hand in mine, and God above us, I pledge the power, and labor, and influence of my life to the cause of the civil and political enfranchisement of woman; because I believe that, in so doing, I work most directly and efficiently for the elevation of the race."

They sat, hand in hand, in silence, looking into each other's eyes.

"I have my reward," said Reba. "But I shall never get through with my story. In all those two wretched nights, I did not close my eyes to sleep. After I knew that there was a chance of gaining my freedom, I prayed every moment to God to teach me what to do with it. Then I was made to see that I must part with my child; there was absolutely no other escape from a life of sin. Oh, my friend, you cannot know the trial I underwent before I acquiesced in that decree. The mother-nature is strong in me. If the world would have given me a corner anywhere, in which to bring her up to womanhood—an honest and happy womanhood—I would have done drudgery all my lifetime; I would have begged my bread, and hers, rather than be separated from her. But in that great, wicked city, there seemed no such thing possible. All the answer, therefore, that I could get to my weeping and entreaty was, simply, that I must place her in God's hands and await the result. I did so, and God was good. He cared for her, and took my lamb to a quiet haven, that I might follow her. When I reached Wyndham, it was

necessary that I should have a name. That of my youth I felt that I had no claim to. Rebecca was my mother's name; it was also in part my own. The month was March, and surely no human being was wronged if I took that name also. God has been good to me. Out of darkness has come great light; but, to thousands, the way I was thrust into, is a way that leads to an infamy that is unspeakably worse than anything which we call death."

Reba's eyes, shining with tears, were fixed on distance, and the agony of remembrance in them pierced her lover's heart.

"Reba," he said, "there is now no shadow of separation between you and me. Lay your drooping head upon my shoulder; trust your weary, weary frame to my embrace. There is no fiber of my heart that is not strong for you, that is not true to you, that does not own you friend, wife, and rightful queen; that will not yield you protection and allegiance, forever and for evermore."

So the heart of the rose is enfolded in its cherishing circlet of leaves; so the vehement, masterful ocean encompasses the smiling, fruitful earth.

Oh! to a woman's heart what bliss is sweeter than the certainty of sure protection, unshaken constancy, and a love so true that, though she reveal her heart to its inmost core, there is no possibility of doubt, detraction or misconception.

To souls like these there come supreme moments in the enjoyments of love, when, to the purest ecstasy of every physical and intellectual capacity, is added, through the super-sensuous powers of the woman, an influx of spiritual life and light, from the very heavens themselves, which lifts and thrills and makes glorious the whole being; and is, to the two souls fused in this divine passion, a broader, deeper, spiritual experience than any gained in church or temple, and only less exalted than those rare moments

when the soul stands face to face with God. To this supreme rapture, the gross delights of the sensualist are no more to be compared than the feast of the blubber-eating Esquimaux to the nectar and ambrosia of Olympus.

Nothing short of this, the sweet, harmonious waking of the full diapason of their being, is worthy of that creative power, almost divine, which nature bestows upon two loving hearts.

Alas! alas! how many noble souls, cherishing the instinctive prescience of these joys, have been forever ruined by searching through the sensualist's paradise to find them.

T

XLI.

THE PESTILENCE THAT WALKETH IN DARKNESS: THE
DESTRUCTION THAT WASTETH AT NOONDAY.

Theodore Moss came home to spend his August vacation. He was twenty now, a fine, manly youth, a son of whom any mother might be proud. Good reports followed him, too. He was a steady and faithful worker, and developed an unusual aptitude for business, and there was a firm and self-reliant manhood about him, which kept him aloof from transgression. Certainly, there was no young man in Wyndham whose prospects were fairer than those of Theodore Moss; no mother who looked up to a son, taller now than herself, and promising her a steadfast reliance in her old age, with more womanly pride and affection than Mrs. Moss.

"When I look back on all the days and nights of hard work and anxious watching that I've spent for that boy," she said, "they seem just like nothing now. I tell you he is more to me than a fortune would be, for if he lives I shall never want; and then he is my boy, my own flesh and blood, to love and to honor, and to care for, besides."

Moses, in his way, was equally proud.

"The boy wears better clothes than ever his father could, but he has earnt 'em, and I wish him joy of 'em. He'll look out for his mother and the young ones when I'm gone. There is many a rich man would give half his fortune for a boy like Theodore."

And Theodore took all the gratulations and praises with the bright self-consciousness of a hopeful young man. He had done well, he meant to do better; to do all that his father and mother expected of him, and more besides than

they could dream of. He felt that his future was broader than the scope of their vision, and he looked forward with joy to the pleasant task of developing before their eyes the latent capacities which were stored in his blood and his brain.

But with all this buoyant hopefulness he carried about with him a secret uneasiness. Going over to call on Miss Joanna and visit Milton, he easily found an opportunity of speaking to the doctor alone. The doctor, who had never kept himself aloof from youth, and who had his own ways and means of putting himself in sympathy with them, soon detected the secret anxiety of Theodore. Kindly and with patient tact, he drew the cause of it to the light. It was the old, terrible story of temptation, of sin, of wicked betrayal, of suffering borne with more than Spartan fortitude, of recourse to charlatans, and the doctor feared, though he did not say it, of ultimate ruin and death; with the deeper pathos of the boy's heartfelt cry, "*Don't let it get to mother.*"

Of this Monster who sits in his Cave of Death, and yearly crunches the bones of thousands of the flower of the world's manhood, lured to him by cunning appliances of youthful passion and restless curiosity, who shall speak. Society lays its finger on the lip of the medical practitioner, but the *mothers of sons* have a right to protest against the blindness, and ignorance, and false teaching which work such havoc and destruction among the best blood of the nation, the travail-bought offspring of their hearts and lives.

The very framework of society, at present, is constituted so as almost inevitably to drive innocent and well-meaning boys to vicious courses. Public opinion forbids the mother to speak even to her own son on this matter, lest, forsooth, the inferior creature should meddle with and impair the high prerogative of the superior sex. With yearning heart

and tearful eye she is constrained to send him out into the world, full armed and panoplied at every point, but the very one at which he is most vulnerable. All the commandments but one she may write upon his heart, but let her beware how she mentions the seventh commandment in his hearing. God says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Man says, "I will commit adultery, I and my sons, and my sons sons, and woe betide the power, of church, or state, or home, that shall raise hand or voice by way of hinderance."

So the boy goes out into the world, at the very age when his newly developed passions are in the ferment of growth, ready fitted to imbibe the teachings and copy the examples of his elders. All about him, in every grade of life, licentiousness is a matter of course among men, and its vilest consequences a mere pleasantry. The youth who keeps himself pure is a spooney, lacking in the spirit and passions of a man, tied still to the apron strings of that old woman, his mother; and the blush of innocent shame on his cheek, or the hot word of defense for the holy memories of home, are themes for scorn and contempt.

When such a state of things is so nearly universal, it is no wonder that women in virtuous homes are compelled to regard the whole male sex as the depraved creatures which they proclaim themselves to be; creatures made by this very course of training, in too many instances, really unable to resist the false appetites which drive them to brothels; for it is a fact that one-half of the men of the world are the victims of a sensual appetite as depraved and unnatural as that of the drunkard for his cups. The consequence is, that they must be kept at arm's length, unless they come in the guise of suitors; and then, if the women are wise, they are to be well tried before they are trusted. In this way the young man, who, from any one of a dozen reasons, is not seeking marriage, is unable to gratify his natural and

reasonable longing for a pure acquaintance with, and intimate knowledge of, the female sex, and is driven to accept the vile alternative which the profligacy of his elders has placed ready made at his hand.

But the prayers of agonized mothers have not gone up, generation after generation, into the ears of an unheeding God. Slowly, perhaps, but surely, the time will come when power over these great moral issues will pass from the hands which have so long ignorantly profaned it, into the purer keeping of enlightened women. And then it will be gradually learned, that as a woman gains the virtue of self-sacrifice through her knowledge of men, so a man must acquire the virtue of self-control through his knowledge of women. So shall the great ends of love be consummated, and the race created anew in purity and strength.

After a three weeks' visit, Theodore went back to New York, leaving behind him golden auguries in the hearts of all who knew him; and carrying with him, more precious than even his mother's parting kiss, the smile with which Maude Darrell had met his modest, manly bow upon the street.

Toward the next spring, the doctor went down to New York. He lodged, as he always did, at the house of Mrs. Crane, a woman who had gone from Wyndham twenty years before, and with whom Theodore also boarded. There was another long consultation between the old man and the youth, in the light of which the doctor's last hope vanished. Theodore caught the sad and downcast ray of his eye, and interpreted it in the true spirit, though his ardent soul failed to catch the widest scope of the premonition.

"You can say nothing to encourage me," he said, sadly. "Well, then, life is robbed of all that made it seem worth having."

"I have suffered more than the martyrs did who were burned at the stake for their faith, but I am a man, and can bear pain.

"There was one of whom I dreamed. I never dared to say I loved her, but every step I gained was dear to me, because it brought me nearer to her. If she is lost to me, there is nothing left in life worth living for."

He looked up with terrible energy in his flashing eye.

"My curse shall rest forever and for evermore," he said, "on the man who brought this upon me; who called my mother an old woman, who goaded me on by sneers at my rustic want of polish, and inflamed my imagination by hellish devices. My curse upon him and his forever—forever."

The doctor spoke calmly to him, and strove to soothe his agitation, and lead him back to the gentle memories of home.

"Oh! my poor mother," he cried, manly tears rolling down his cheeks, "when you know how your boy is disgraced, it will kill you. Doctor," his eye was clear and glittering now; "I will never look into my mother's face again."

The doctor left him that evening to return to Wyndham. Before midnight a pistol shot was heard in his room, and the inmates of the house, rushing in, found him lying in a pool of blood upon the floor.

Of the anguish and desolation of Rachael Moss' heart, I cannot speak. Bereaved by the hands of wicked men, as surely as if they had waylaid and murdered her darling by the roadside, she could turn only to God for comfort. His eye only measures the depths of such afflictions, His hand only can minister consolation.

Months afterward, Rachel said: "It has made me humbler, I think. If Theodore had lived, I might have triumphed over poor Jane Meredith, in the trials which

she has seen with her only child—the child which she has toiled for, and watched for, as much as I for all mine. And now, parted from her husband, with her little child upon her hands, she is a deeper trouble and anxiety than when she was a babe herself. God teaches us how to sympathize with one another, and I can pray for Jane, and her children, with a full heart.”

Let us turn to pleasanter themes.

There was a quiet wedding in the church that Fall, which set the outward seal upon the union of two hearts, which had long beat only for each other. The doctor gave the bride away, and felt no secret pang.

The old mansion has been refitted; the fire burns brightly on its hearth; faces of children gleam from its windows, and in the hearts of its owners eternal sunshine reigns.

Within the year after his departure from Wyndham, news came, in a roundabout way, of the death of Peyton Clavering. He fell in a duel.

The doctor still lives. There is a slowness now in his gait, which is not deliberation, but rheumatism. He has a cough, too, and his eye is dimmed. Men say with respectful regret that the doctor is failing. His immediate friends realize to themselves, from day to day, his growing years, and accept nature's consolations. But, as he rides over those gray and wind-swept hills, there are in every hamlet, and almost every farm-house, women whose eyes grow dim with tears, and whose hearts swell with unspoken apprehension, as they mark the doctor's slow decline. Women by whose bedsides he has stood, when they went down alone into the Valley of the Shadow of Death; the fearless, skillful, never-failing friend, when all others failed; women who, in long, languishing illnesses, which no other eye could comprehend, knew by the silent, pitying beam of his, that he did comprehend, did patiently and kindly sympathize with, when others doubted or sneered. There

is a taint upon the doctor's orthodoxy; but the thousands of silent, grateful prayers from women's hearts, which bear his name to heaven, are faithful witnesses there of his noble, manly life

THE END.

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Rebecca; or, a woman's Secret

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